Sulfur 20

SUN BY MICHAEL PALMER

UNACHIEVED BY PHILIP LAMANTIA

ROBERTS AVENS ON *THE BURIAL OF THE SOUL*

WALKING THE NEW YORK BEDROCK ALIVE IN THE SEA OF INFORMATION BY GARY SNYDER

RUSSELL FRASER ON OSIP MANDELSTAM

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SULFUR magazine has its main offices c/o English Department, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti MI 48197 (telephone: 313/483-9787). Subscriptions are $15 a year (3 issues) for individuals, $22 for institutions; a single copy is $6. Current issue is Vol. VII, #2. Foreign subscriptions, including Canada, add $3 for book rate mail, $12 for air mail postage. Make checks to SULFUR in U.S. currency. Back issues (except #1) are available. CLAIMS FOR MISSING NUMBERS can be honored only within 3 months after publication. No unsolicited manuscripts will be returned unless accompanied by SASE. ISSN #: 0730-305X.

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DESIGN AND TYPOGRAPHY BY BARBARA MARTIN
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FALL 1987

A LITERARY TRI-QUARTERLY OF THE WHOLE ART

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COVER: IRVING PETLIN / *Song for Sarah. . .Puzzle / 1985 / Pastel on Paper / 30" x 22" / Courtesy of Kent Fine Art, NYC*

Sulfur gratefully acknowledges the following individuals who made contributions in the fall of 1986 to help fund our transition from Los Angeles to Ypsilanti: Jeffrey Blue, Peter Quartermain, Martha Sattler, George Butterick, Bruce Campbell, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Gilbert Van Camp, Joseph Gold, Alan Golding, James Laughlin, Irving Malin, Sherman Paul, Robert Schiller, Lynn Shoemaker, Charles Simic, Donald Wesling, Peter Du Bois, The Gerber Foundation, Dan Gerber, Leon Golub, James Heckman, Hank Lazer, Andrew Levy, Martha Lifson, Beverly Mackey, Antonet O'Toole, Michael Sherick, John Taggart, Oscar Weinberger, Shelley White, Marjorie Perloff, Ronald Gottesman, Elaine Attias, Jerry Glenn, David Rattray. 1987 issues of Sulfur are made possible in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

MICHAEL PALMER

Sun

A headless man walks, lives
for four hours

devours himself
You bring death into your mouth—X

we are called—
sleep, festinate, haul rocks

The eye follows itself across the screen
Words pass backward

onto the tongue
are swallows

in clay cliffs
The sea's no picture at all

blue mountain incised with a face
ends in burnt cluster

mud, private telematics, each
person controlling a machine

This is owned by the Man Roy works for
in Insurance work

Words will say this
resolved to write a play

Place an allogene within the graft
The hood is black with two holes for my mouths

I am not the prisoner
of such a space

In a certain way all this still exists
but the scene and the mirror no longer exist

. . .sky a painter's house
No yes

You churn hymns into fragments
No then yes

Asleep you set fire to this house

Mr. Duck and Mr. Mouse
mass as shadows

An indefinite calculus
watches, writes and rewrites

Animals are emperors, tamed and fabulous

The world is an object

The world is an object

Place yourself here as if on a surface

Replace horizon with an equals sign

B says, It could be made of silk,
of marble, of extract of clouds

B asks, Is the discourse
of objects specific

Can one imagine laws. . .
Can you decode the birth of the sign

from the miniskirt, the unconscious, TV, the
mirage

of the referent, the equation
of A with A

A body disappears into itself
its mirror self or sister self

The marks have no dimension
They stream from the creases of the hand

Let's call this The Quiet City
where screams are felt as waves

plunging or released, a content
and an alibi, a matrix

at zero stains you with ink
My speech explaining the layers went very well

B says, The blind are hideous, the city laughs
and you tread on corpses in your mask

says that winter nights it's both sweet and sad
to hear a bell

says that these lines
have neither eyes nor ears

and that once you woke entangled in her hair

Mr. Tulliver assaults his horse, wants his money

Chainsaw memories cause laughter among the hierophants
She spread her legs wide and braced them

We, the center, offer narratives
We have three days to live

in smog, crossing the Plains of Id
On the wall it is written:

Symbolism died for your sins
Own the body you desire

This I is the I who speaks
(signed Scardanelli)

Day One is called Tongues

Day Two might be This-and-Only-This

Day Three is Antinomy

It was nice to come back here
lots of mountains, etc,
living pillars of flesh

Day One is called Trace

Day Two is Map

Day Three is X, Name of X, Name of N

It is a spring day in a state of siege

I offer you a flat land

Sun flares, then divides

From the Côte des Morts she writes,
The town has changed and artists are objects

and objects have no skin—
I could not have returned

To the left of the piano is theory

Call it Alpha in Lyre
Call it Ceterae or Last Nights,

The Blue Guide, Grid, The Private
Experience of the Blinking Man

Call it Ones (split open)
Call it A Scratch Band from Duluth

written entirely inside
the body of another

its moments free of him
The pages turn themselves

Then I knead my breasts so that milk spurts out
across his face and neck, silver

coin under the tongue, bread and money
for the ferryman. This wire

travels through her teeth
as if through a slot

I ate all the food in the world
and left people hungry

All these stories are the same
There is only one story—

but not really—
so I swallowed the corn and all was well

For three-hundred years they let me eat undisturbed
Now there is a present of watery light

cast onto you, the body bent back
in an attitude of reception

A statue controls our weather
Call it Live at the It Club

someone falling or depicted as falling
mirror folded about you and within you

unreadable, even invisible
The snow is ours, no part of this page

coating Moscow's courtyards

Call it Hilbert's Dream or Papyrology,
Simulations or The Bathers

I nudged Dante off my desk
into the flood. The others quickly followed

streaming from that cafe
once known as The Rose

We spoke in the zero code
system of assemblage and separation

arcuate scar, shadow and necklace
doubled by their reflections

then redoubled in the lens
34,000 words spread out before me

words like incarnadine, tide and cheer
asymptote, locus, tear or tear

waiting to say things
(you cannot say things)

and the anagram for *names*,
for *stone*, for *arm*

claustral body woven from signs
Call it Table or call it Trace

B says, The real table does not exist
I sang my name and turned into a skeleton

in a tree, you below me
I'm writing this diary in the cold

of our winter here
the city like a fortress

Toller has betrayed the Revolution
The clock is set

Our pages

burn themselves
as theater

awaiting an extinguishing
mist

I sang my name but it sounded strange
I sang the trace then

without a sound,
then erased it

The body of a cellist is floating in the sea

Let us number all the sentences beginning with one
then one plus one. Here

light offers its signal, its parts
Words pop out of a rock

It is the last book, a point
before the next. A body

has been sighted floating in the sea
At center stage she bows

then the dancers surround her
Malcolm sat beside me

He spoke quietly
about music

This notebook contains shadows
nothing else. Dystopic

figures confound the matrix
bore holes in it

through us. One speaks
and the other doesn't

I say space to mean
an ache or a page

twinned logics of a face
The remains

of a fly in a bottle
seek our gaze

We have invented a mechanism for preserving the dead
Here only the head is shown
as encased within a block of glass

The head read us this:
You have one eye too many; masked

as myself you speak;
suspend thought from its bolt

The head told them this:
I want the stolen word here,

statue fallen silently among the leaves
where we've come to sleep;

a screen is ours,
it's called Ways and Means,

its name is The old, old man,
and its name is called Haddock's eye

The head read us this:
I have water

I have bone
Everything's a sign

to a talking stone
A thread read us this

Here whispers collect dust;
fields fold up then out;

enter through the curtain
and swallow your words;

a screen is ours
infinite, hyaline

a woman bent double in the street
is screaming Money Money

The throat read us this

I was sitting in the dark ivy at the gate
of the desiring-machine no windshield no

wheels I was sitting in the forest the great
counter-weight I was truly lost I was seated

behind a screen I was aware of things those
things were me amazing the forked branch

spilling names I had been-not I
had been not-lost I had seen you once

and clearly once I had been remembered
only once the boy

shouts Mica and gleams I am in a
versionary state you are in

me as history I fix
and crystal to it

inside the inside once

alp air

down the lane

I travelled a little

was limned

where some father says
Your words are not connect

The path we take is 1 to 6
ending in a bubble. Does all

music enter into these cries

Do stones explode at dusk
in us

Did you paint on the walls
of the deaf man's house

I travelled a little

to the snow-fields, then down

How to say I or
we in rival voice

These
new waves circused in a void

placed themselves before us
spoke their tactics

and their practices, traced
each friction and line

each seam of an increasingly minuscule night

A house you enter and remark
I no longer understand
what such things are for

Name you this: a region,
a language, a pot of stew

A magical chain
shreds particles and objects

Name you this: painter
of only shadows, paramorph,

figure walking
in ice, erased figure falling

whose liquid we will drink
as it coats our skins

Story of hands abandoning their fingers,
of an organ emerging from the throat

A man with dynamite strapped to his waist
sings for the first time

lens
question

in

And black
As when

Story of golden doves with silver dots,
a word beside itself

This building is not

A word is beside itself

A word twists backward
peeling its skin up over its face

A word looks behind itself
Here you are law, a boat

in flames or a gaze
Does it say book

anywhere on this book
Does it say Jonah in this book

Does it say screen or stain
and compose a tone of light

directly behind the eye
Suppose there's a portrait

on this paper I'm holding
Day and night

the shattered statuary was heaping up
before the one newly named

La Violaine or The Park
Call you this with a dot

Time of signal fires, no
memory or map. The

inframaculit wakes
at the sound of breaking glass

Throughout the city
there's the sound of breaking glass

We have forgotten it
slipped between the pages

falls outside
what is thought

After the angled dark
what is meant by book

Scribed on the streaming body:
Song to End a World

Through the glass box words
pass unrecognised, thinking us

now dead to you, reader,
now an ammonite curve

incomplete, now tablet
of faint scratches, now redness

in margins, now past
and pastness. Now a filament of light

penetrates the image-base
where first glyphs are stored,

Lucy and Ethel, the Kingfish,
Beaver and Pinky Lee

are spoken, die and undie
for you

like a war viewed from poolside
by philosophers and sheiks,

senators and dialectician-priests
The day has begun

The bed aches in its dream
of durable densities, rain,

a house whose balconies
vibrate and hum

in space. Do not write
in this space. Never sleep

in this house. At the Salle Waag
we spoke in growls

while at the Meise and Kaufleuten
there were final afterwords

and many teeth fell out
among the many mirrors and many lamps

hurled to the ground
This is not The Shining Windows

nor a glance
at "the sea"

Once your name was Therefore
then Rubble then Ash

question of whose body
in what photograph

I do not recognise this music
Moon drops from sky and burns in field;

man hangs from rope; woman points gun
toward a world where

I is a person
formed of letters in salt,

Five Figures in a Room
or The Triadic Ballet

The clock is set for "departure"

Rowers curl through this air
bent against it, spewing sand,

light-lines and ochre points,
songs in the future-past

will have been known as
The Well, The Needle's Eye

and The Book of the Machines
The branch bleeds

so that a soul can speak
twilight disk

writ on you
ilynx and alea

desire in a net
A new year

is being recorded here,
long saplings with paper blossoms

hollyhocks and painted sleds
Everything is number

a street and the figures on it
stolen genres and formats

in a bar in Bangkok
waiting for death above the flames

(You are coated with fourteen microns of gold
so whatever you say is true)

---

because the words disgusted me why write?
signed Schelling, signed An Arm or A Door, signed The Desert
to the West

This is how one pictures the angel of history
signed Series B, signed A or letter of A, signed Bakhtin's Names

---

This isn't time so I'll leave you now
signed It, signed Mantis, signed A Stone in the Grass

I lost my brain when I put a fork through my hat
signed House of Music

This was the trouble with the sun-dial or saint dial
signed Writing Itself

The lines through these words
form other, still longer lines

dust in a steady shower
It is our fortune to have been born

at the crossroads of a chiasma
in a land known as How to Laugh

and How to Die. Did spine write this

story of

my life in a pyramid
designing those pyramids yet to come

those galaxies now being formed,
constellations, touching myself, rubbing against different
objects

in total darkness
a year of extreme pain

but fortunately I am perfectly dead
and can see into the past through a lens

signed The Worlds As It Is
tango converted to a fugue

black milk, golden hair
cliffs, bridges, grey lake

and a grave in the air
It rains

It burns
Carry something to somewhere

Tie something to something else
Hold your head in your right hand

as a lantern
a light impossible for this season

and so we turn away from these sounds
raise our Illyrian hats

visit our beds
and ring a bell

X, name of X
we are

A bark sets out on the honeycomb's flow
We called it Le Départ

RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS

Draft #3: Of

CUT

Hinge-loss door, lack latch
ice-ribbed, straws, wad
T-top conglomerate, gritty glass
smash, street-glacier moraine Pressed
particle board, its jujubes of shellack
sweet sweet plastic lobbed hither
shredding rips, not too much shelter anyway.
guttering.

Little howling water marbles ice.
Peaked cans junk cubist shingles.
Trounce state cultivated motor auto.
Flop donut. Scat pretzel.
Uneased acceleration and diesel heavy
smoke shot straight rays
at an unseasoned toddler, some unformed
particles strain to come
"eye-shaped." The rest
could care less.
Everything
but weed slack's
loose with melted
writing.
Like one wrote IMPISM right on that rude wall.

Words come just like that, vision.
beak black bleak
cut back through arced site protocol,
member the day. Each micro-face splice gutted
that
brekkkl they brekk the lyric ruck.

"don't call me a chef honey
I'm a crook"

skew. gutter.
a woman scavaged food from that

caesura. Which is
traditional in this
setting as a
size places: there's here, and there's there.
A there and a here (meditative
derivative) calls
"I" pivot, middle,
calls "I's" name,
sends I winding on site through all that middle
middle space so easily assize,
assimilated viewer of
unfermented ground.

Would you note
the pretty poem
I might (therefore) of wrote?

It's this time-puzzled line-lumber fermenting place,
ice

of words, enormous slant, difficult OF.
being. Junctures of saturation
beyond catalogue, yet catalogue HAS TO DO
do
syntax; how, why being beyond me. in the
totality of its relations
unstatable the what.
ice treacherous.

Of is a voice and of is another, and there, here
of,
black and crest, the flair
"of things" in a langdscape.

Thick with power conversations, this smashed
grēen
on street ice
thicngs are the
juncted ponts of craw cast octopus.

a silent space (I
walk here) populous.
possessed forsaken bridges, junk
things, a hinge from word to word a thingk
of what
grammatical conjuncture can seem
adequate to of.

Another blizzard on our hands.
Avocado green, almond, blue heron, sunbeam
our choice
of colors our choice of toppings "rain" down

yellow white snow pee snow white snow grey snow ice
snow peace snow gloom

Amazing what a pack of fierceness
binds the backroads between tinker towns and makes
the garrulousness of the travellers virtuously
impenetrable.
We're all
(it seems) troubled by "them's"
as far as it goes.
Hard to get home; this is, this travelling
of
is
home.
The streets the malls a homey homeless home.
ahung with things.

micro things and macro things
flip back "eat this" "o boy"
in silence chomp your sugary
craw sand.

White snow-chemical for melting
purer than snow beads the rows like
Hansel's bread. Some trail.
Some house. Some crumbs.
Protest, pivot, empty food-candy,
fatten you up child.
So thirsty

swallow wrong way a cherry
coke. Rub her
cough.
"Red spoil" backs up
the tongue wetting a small mouth'd paper-plastic
Suffocate does it?
Discount!
The little MACS and diet YUMS and PUBS
we know

Then talk to, about silence

in silence.

Cabin fever
in the grey
world.

Travelling
the door of the world
an enormous hinge
set
opens
onto of.

Closer? farther?
To study and inhabit
(cars humping up the holding pit)
of one foot after another, fueled and connected in itself
(lapis and turquoise these are my birthrights)
to something inarticulable
(rude grey nobs covered with hinges).

quarrels, petitions, blanknesses, outrage,
coincidence
with something blown up
it is already here
the debris'

swift
exchange.

The door, the hinge,
the templet turning
the visitations of
of.

These possessives
take the place once held
by distance.

February-July 1987

AUGUST KLEINZAHLER

Two Poems

LOVE POEM

As long as the cat comes home
and the skinheads keep
to their concrete shell, over the fence
screaming *break your face,* smashing empties

what need is there to worry or come undone
so the wolf slips in,
cutting through us like cheese, soft cheese
an emulsion of blood and cheese

except for the radio tower close by
blighting *Ruby, My Dear*
till you shift in your chair and it's right,
both speakers, all there. . .

Poor Monk, dying at the Baroness's
on the hill above Weehawken
night after night
cars sluicing into the tunnel below

into the city, fanning lights
across the broad river,
the West Side throbbing
across black water

out of notes, dying.

THE TREE

Pinch a branch to see if it's quick
or else the thing'll just stand
for who knows how long
sun, wind, frost, chafing it, dogs
pissing at the base
birds nesting up high where leaves had been

while the years blur
and the town next door's evacuated
so the kids don't turn stupid
from the water that solvents leached into
or testicle cancer
diagnosed in the Mayor on down

Cape Canaveral is renamed Eric Dolphy
your friends all swell, turn
ugly then drop
after their cute little girls grow up to fuck brutes
marry them and breed

but that shield of bark
photons roam the grain of
and pathogens try to corkscrew into
only to fall apart and dry. . .

because it would not bloom
because it would not die

the axman came

PHILIP LAMANTIA

Unachieved

Compared to the transcendental realm, the world under the
roofed-in-cave is somber
but the colors, signatures
five senses and the sixth, their purifier
touch by imagination's feather
sight & sound of liquid flight from those waters the spirit
skyrs

Beauty comes to it at the heart's desire
to transmute out of pleasure's pleasure a distillation of birds into
visionary symbols
the processional of variable coloration of finches, choral lights,
that and the shadow we brood

I, in the wild state, inner feelings soar
Transcendence the mental dance imagines, but for an instant, as
dear Byrant returning to stone
The starry sky, Pluto's mirror
The way you could talk about your life, splinters off a
carpenter's floor under a microscope, those perfect symme-
tries or better, visible shavings, but never the tool
Invisible something may strike through the black room of higher
perfection
self-torture in the humanisphere a sure thing before a whole
forest revolves to sign a bio-regional imperative
consensus of the Hopi Way Separatist communes of no more
than three thousand souls
Dianas out of Gaea's caves
this window does not fade from view in the coming pre-indus-
trial age
retrieved in a narrow shoal where a Gull Feather given in bliss
turns the deranged corpse in ritual passes
healing prayers legitimize to exorcize the sick stain of being that
death, die, at sight of the Androgynous Republic
Drums of magic, *salve*,
caught here

to return to the caesura, the interrupted fault line Frisco day
which tunnels avian thought
Everytime I think I'll turn off the main vein, quotidian concerns
take over initiating script (social realities relative to mediocrity) where you cut it, different than esoteric cant
but lingually deeper into it, like 'cut it' regarding the sacred
science

. . . this flow of thought is different for the surrealist than for the
rationalist diehard
that is, I refuse to 'come to my senses' since A'hm in 'em
Emotion signs this pain you're at the terminal syndrome Fabulous tunnels turn inner to bring up The Transcendent World
Anew (it's never what you thought it was)
What I'm getting at it is, why don't you examine with great care
your entire body of death?
And
reorient the auditor to a gnosis so mystical the tree bark from
which it claws refuses to inscribe whiteness
One with the supreme ego
nothing more elegant on the avian
plane
flicker mandibles arrange the dwelling
and from all the gifts of Gaea, head for their origin:

In my dream, the Goddess in her heavenly palace on the
earth
a kind of Marienbad in lunar light
She in her silver gown slightly decolleté
has me watch the Stellar Mirror
while stars of the Pleiades run in a rhythm of Eight
and do an astral dance, *tout court*

(I tell you, very matter of factly, this Dream though many years
old has forced itself to be told)

Thus begins it, Love, she and the avatar in the Bo-Tree Garden
and consider from where I'm situated here in the Far West

green lightning at Thunder's coast
looking east to Pharoanic Egypt where the West began
bonsai trees among the pines

a swan's luminous power in air of mist

haunted redwood shadows
world immortal because AMOR wove a tissue clear to specular sight
Wings of this city
an otherwise haunted hillscape
ultimate YS
Frisco once also covered with ancient waves
a kind of lost Atlantis several kalpas ago
its seven hills imagine old traditions of jazz

Harmony is that secret
between the machines coming through Death is that machine

the wild wee drop
snow to the solar radiant a fumbled perfected Rebus of mental luminoids
music married to meaning when the orange
almost red-streaked crest
magnifies millet
to mark off the duration:
Ornithos
gold
a parabola
The treasure perch is you and me, love
a tiny winged fiery tongue through the green window
Forms are weddings
that spring trays of meaning between chirps
flutes garner elipses of word
fork between eclipses of comet-lore across lagoons

salt
from the Mediterranean Sea fixed here at Nova Albion
A boy painting earth colors above the valley town
my first pœtry atop San Bruno Mountain was all power ek-stasis
as if all tracks had left the last railway station
the sensation of sudden union with another attraction
to decipher no matter what suffering there's no pain at the taste that tells an epic begins

brown & red over the mental rainbow
not to close this grandeur beyond words?
War mental war and no other These the weapons on the highest nest Golden V sang to Violent Ocean
It was forbidden to know what the melting glyphs said over the horizon
the ways down in the valley flowed away like darkness painting poetry to light
At this stage of the great game you can assassinate all the stand-ins with cosmic disdain *El Poder del Niño Jesus*
In the dreams of the Philippine 'master' late of Frisco gone to Alaska
'Joke's on you' The Plague reminds The Fluke
Grey cant explosions through cells
prisons rent to specular essence
where it counts. . .is it laughter?
The old necromancer calls 'em up every day faster than thought Ibis eye of the Sacred Geomant
Gaea doing this dance down on the plain
coming of the inland sea where once there was none
I begin to steal Gaea
but Gaea is another circle of the rose Pantheism of the moment
where all rivers meet from the mountaintop

Caveat, emptor!

Thunder for Gaea who's more than thunder
mysterious as in the beginning
Gaea the more I say you the seldom I leap through you
to my own ego
upon the bread your birds beak

this look of red-crowned avifauna

the moon conjuncts Saturn
NOW
and
today

ROBERTS AVENS

Reflections on Wolfgang Giegerich's *"The Burial of the Soul in Technological Civilization"*

The present article is an attempt to explore the difficult and controversial connection between Christianism and technology or technical science. Let me set the tone to what follows by referring to two American authors who have dealt with this matter. The cultural historian Lynn White Jr., having pointed to the habit of calling our time the "post-Christian" age, notes that the substance of our thinking, still dominated by an implicit faith in perpetual progress, "is rooted in, and is indefensible from, Judeo-Christian theology." In another passage which brings us even closer to the main thesis of this article, White states that "modern science is an extrapolation of natural theology and. . .modern technology is at least partly. . .an Occidental, voluntarist realization of the Christian dogma of man's transcendence of, and rightful mastery over, nature."[1] In view of this, I suggest, we should not hesitate to propose (and the rest of our discussion is intended to bear this out) that, in spite of appearances, we live in an era that, far from being anti- or post-Christian, is eminently and uniquely Christian.

In a similar vein Theodore Roszak, the rhapsodist of counter-culture, maintains that Christianism had prepared the *psychic* ground for the scientific revolution during the age of Galileo, Kepler and Newton. For this revolution was not so much a revolt against Christian religious psychology as a rejection of the pagan Aristotelian world-view which saw nature as alive, full of gods and demons never far below the surface of things.

It was the advent of Christianism that effected the momentous transition from myth to history. Christianism alone could claim that the Word (*Logos*) became flesh at one time, at one place in our human personality. Christ, unlike the mythopoeic gods of antiquity, was *real,* because he was *historical.* For the first time in the course of human affairs the words "history" and "reality" became identical. It is here, says Roszak, that we must look for the origin of that "fanatically secular sensibility" which would later result in what

William Blake called "the spirit of evil [read: shadow] in things heavenly"—the bomb physics, concentration camps and all the other Frankensteinian nightmares of science and technology.[2]

I shall now turn to Wolfgang Giegerich—a contemporary neo-Jungian (archetypal) psychologist who, in my view, is the first to have pursued our theme in a thoroughly compelling, radically new and pitiless manner. Giegerich speaks as a depth psychologist and psychotherapist and not as a theologian, even though this kind of psychological speech cannot be completely immune to the religious and theological aspects of the problem. It must be also stressed that he is not trying to attack or to malign technology or, for that matter, Christianism. There is no guilty party in the fateful collusion of these two powers.

Christianism or the Christian truth, according to Giegerich, not only has its upper spiritual (personal belief, inner experience) characteristics, but also its own bodily reality and gravity. Hence, when he speaks of Christian truth (or of truth at all) he does not mean truth in the theological or metaphysical sense of some *absolute truth*, but in the psychological sense that an idea or fantasy is *psychologically* true if it is effective.

Last but not least, Christianism, for Giegerich, primarily means not the teachings of the early Church (*Urgemeinde*) but a Western historical force which was shaped both by the ancient Jewish inheritance and the Greek spirit. In his own words: Christianism is "a transpersonal, spiritual reality and a historical force which realized itself in the history of the Christian West"; "an independent objective reality which human beings find themselves exposed to in one way or another."[3]

Giegerich's essay dealing with our topic is entitled "The Burial of the Soul in Technological Civilization."[4] The word "burial" in this context is not equivalent to "death"; rather it conveys the idea of the "hidden," or "depth," and the like. In this sense the event of the Incarnation must be understood as the (hidden) truth of technology, and technology as the uncovering, fulfillment and completion of the Incarnation. Put differently, Giegerich's aim is to show the subterranean link between apparently secular, even godless, technology and the idea of the Incarnation. On the face of it, such a project seems to contradict the commonly accepted view that modern technological civilization originated in the Age of Enlightenment when Western humanity liberated itself not only from the Christian religion but from a religious outlook *tout court* and founded a wholly secular, antidivine world.

The first thing to keep in mind in this context is that both modern technology and modern science are distinctively Occidental—a circumstance which should lead us to suspect that they must be rooted in the very depths of Western psyche. Western man became addicted to technology (*Verfahren*) not because he was exceptionally intelligent or because only the West had created the scientific preconditions for subsequent inventions, but rather the other way around: the Westerner devoted his intelligence almost exclusively to scientific and technological progress because his consciousness was archetypally predetermined to proceed in this direction. As we know, the Chinese, besides other technical discoveries, invented gun powder earlier than the Europeans; but, whereas in China gun powder was used to shoot off fireworks for the ritual celebration of the New Year, in Europe it led to the production of cannons, bombs and finally the atomic rocket. Technical discoveries were obviously possible within the orbit of Chinese culture; yet the use of these discoveries was fundamentally different because the Chinese attitude toward being (reality) was different.

Incarnation and the World of Myth

Giegerich believes that man's attitude toward reality finds its expression in the central tenets of religion and, inversely, these tenets condition consciousness by lending it a definite shape and direction. What fundamentally distinguishes the religion of the West from all the other "great religions" is the Incarnation—the proposition or claim that God has entered the world in the empirical (literal) figure of the man Jesus from Nazareth. Thus, says Giegerich, if the West is unique by virtue of two "happenings"—the development of a technological scientific civilization and a historically based "absolute religion" (Hegel)—it is not unreasonable to surmise that these two events may be closely connected or even identical. C.G. Jung saw the conglomerate "Christianity-technology" as our historical burden: "My problem is to wrestle with the big monster of the historical past, the great snake of the centuries. . .the historical burdens Christianity has heaped upon us."[5] But how can Christian doctrine be a burden?

Ordinarily Christianism is seen as the saving message concerned with the inner, subjective realities of man, his individual morality (love of the neighbor, etc.). Giegerich, however, is not interested in this sort of personal religiosity. He wants to do justice to the repressed shadow of Christianity (its burden) which is at work in *objective reality*, in actual events (science, industry, technology). What is necessary therefore is the integration and redemption of

what Jung called the Fourth-shadow, material reality ruled by the Prince of this world.[6]

Before we proceed it is necessary to make clear that Giegerich does not use the words "truth" (or the "Christian truth") and "reality" as prefabricated metaphysical constructs or as elements of *his* philosophical "system." Rather, he is only concerned with the kind of truth that, let's say, the story of the Incarnation claims for itself, i.e., truth in the emphatic absolute way that is posited in the story. Hence "methodologically it would make no sense whatsoever to postulate as an a priori. . .category of thought what is only a *product* of a particular event in Western mythology. . ."[7]

In mythical ritualistic cultures truth and realness belonged together: the real was also the true and the true only true to the extent that it was real. This confluence of the two has the character of *phainesthai* (appearance, shine). The word "phenomenon," for Giegerich, equals the word "image." Phenomena have no backs: they are what they mean and mean what they are. What manifests itself and impresses the soul with a numinous effect is true by virtue of its shining. To illustrate this, Giegerich refers to a conversation between Jung and a chief of the Pueblo Indians. For the chief and his people, the sun was the divine Father. Jung asked the chief whether he did not think that the sun was a ball of fire, shaped by an invisible God. In other words, Jung used the argument of Augustinus: "God is not the sun, but He who made the sun." For the Indian this was, Jung tells us, the most awful blasphemy. He merely answered: "The sun is God. Every one can see that." "This *is* the Father; there is no Father behind it."[8]

We must now contrast in more detail mythical Gods with the Christ event. In the world of myth it is not unusual for Gods to take on human form and appear as mortals. But—and this is crucial—we can never say of a mythical God that he is the "true man" nor that he is the "true God." The divine and human components of these Gods are never "absolutely true" or literally real. Christ, on the other hand, is neither simply a God who has assumed human appearance nor simply a man who has become equal to God nor some half divine, in-between creature, but a true God born as the Father for eternity ***and*** a true man born of the Virgin Mary. It is extremely important for Christianism that there be a fully pure and intense recognition of Christ's divine ***and*** human nature, and that there shall be no weakening or adjustment of this paradox whatsoever. Rather, the two opposing natures are to be together in one and the same person without conflict. They are not to be so crassly conceived that the two natures for all practical purposes fall into two

separate essences which could only by chance have found themselves in one and the same person. This precarious tight rope performance, which proposes the idea of a reality in which the divine and the human are *simultaneously* identical and separate, is called *perichoresis*, the reciprocal interpenetration of divine and human nature. God and man, *Logos* and *sarx*, Word and flesh, have become irrevocably fused at *one point*—in the person of Jesus the Christ. Heaven and earth have become the same, they interpenetrate each other. The heavenly *Logos* is now buried in earthly flesh. Giegerich calls this event "the somatization of being"—the establishment of a new composition of being in the sense of an empirical physical reality. Incarnation furnishes the only mythical base capable of supporting our concept of facticity and a sensorily objective corporeality. Only the Christian vision makes Plato's phrase: the body, the grave of the soul (*soma sēma psychēs*, Gorg. 493a) really true.[9]

Today for most people the first question in any talk about God has to do with his existence or non-existence. In the world of myth, however, questions of this kind simply do not arise. For example, one cannot say that Zeus existed or that he didn't exist. One lived daily in the light of Helios, one felt its radiance in one's body. Similarly, we do not ask: are there dogs? Is there wind? Is there life on earth? Natural phenomena have outpaced our questions about their existence long ago and our doubts have come always too late, because the answers were given by nature itself, i.e., by phenomena and their numinous shine.

Seeing God in the sun or in thunder has nothing to do with superstition or credulity; it is a kind of seeing that must be understood in the context of the mythical meaning of the word "God." God (*theos*) does not signify an acting person or a supreme being; initially it was not a possible subject of a sentence but a predicate, a predicative concept. The word *theos* served to state something about *real events*; it had the meaning of "unheard of," "extraordinary," "wonderful." The ancient Greeks could therefore say: "When a man helps his fellow man, that is God." The event, the phenomenon is God. "God" signified a quality of real events themselves, their effect on man. The Gods of myth were natural, self-evident Gods so that it was impossible to believe in them or to doubt their existence.[10]

The new Christian God has ceased to be a self-evident natural God. As "pure" spirit, "pure" love, etc. he can be present only through faith and through the preaching of his word. By the same

token he became a completely supernatural, transcendent, extra-mundane God—"the true God", the absolute *behind* sensate reality. According to Giegerich all this "is not simply a gain, but also a loss. The rise to the absolute is, as an *ab-solvere* (a detaching), at the same time a deprivation: God suffered considerable loss in substance and is, as the infinite, only an infinitely diluted remainder of what he once was. . ."[11] It is a loss because his status as a phenomenal reality has been exchanged for the impoverished status of an assertion or dogmatic statement, etc. "God was only able to acquire his literal existence by paying the price of his substantiality, self-evidence, and worldly embodiment." In short: "As God becomes world-less by his obtaining ab-soluteness, so earthly reality becomes God-less."[12]

To compensate, so to speak, for his lack of being, God, in the Christian story, became flesh. Enfleshment, according to Giegerich, means three things. First, God's essence ceases to be only image-like, mythical. God wants to be positively "someone," a substantial being, a being in flesh. Second, the fact that this God (*summum ens*, supreme being) must *become* flesh, shows that from the very outset he lacks something—that he is incorporeal, insubstantial, unreal. The natural Gods never need to *become* flesh because they always carry their corporeality in their image-like or imaginal nature. Third, in the event of the Incarnation a twofold change takes place: a change in the essence of the flesh and a simultaneous change in the essence of nature. Giegerich wants us to really listen to *what* is being said in the sentence "*Logos* becomes flesh." The crux of the matter is not what is meant (in the sense of a "true" dogmatic statement), but what is really said, i.e., what is effective and historically real. The idea of the Incarnation should not be protected from historical reality as if it were something in which an individual is free to believe or not to believe. It must be realized that this idea implies a decision about the very essence of reality, of what henceforth is to be called "real." In the saying "the Word becomes flesh" something enormous *happens*—not only to the *Logos* which descends from heaven, but also to the flesh (the terrestrial, temporal, mortal reality assumed by the *Logos*). In effect, we are witnessing here an event of awesome proportions: the flesh—in its oneness with the *Logos*—acquires a radically different nature. The very idea of flesh, earth, reality is changed. The flesh is no longer natural, but flesh from above; indeed it is not flesh at all but, so to speak, a "logolized," abstract flesh.

In the world of myth the natural reality was not without its own *logos*, but it was the natural *logos*, the *logos* of nature. Now however

a reversal takes place: the *logos* which previously was hidden in nature has broken out of it, has become independent, absolute. God's enfleshment, in Giegerich's view, inaugurates an ontological revolution. Henceforth only what is *logos*-like will be called real. In the event of Christ a new concept of reality is sketched, a concept which later will become the justifying ground of the natural sciences. The Incarnation, seen ontologically, is the grandiose outline of the idea that nature can be replaced by a *second, no longer natural nature*. It is the program designed to substitute a technological world for the natural world. The theological term for this kind of corporeality is "flesh" (*sarx*); the contemporary philosophical designation is "positive, technological reality."

Technology is *Logos* because it originates in reason; it is a product of the mind, an idea. At the same time technology is flesh, because it is corporeal reality and not simply an idea. And finally, technology is that which has "become," because it is not something which originates out of itself (as in the case of nature) but is artificially made, the conversion of an idea into tangible reality. In fine, the flesh, after the Incarnation, has acquired a new meaning: it is "made," technological flesh, a second nature.

We can also say that in the wake of the event of Incarnation, being (reality) is translated from the language of nature into the language of physics and technology. Occasionally we still call physics, chemistry, etc. natural sciences even though what they investigate is no longer nature (the self-evident) but, on the contrary, that which is attainable by looking away from nature and using highly artificial tools, utensils and methods. The so-called natural sciences serve the Incarnation, and their ultimate goal is not to acquire knowledge, but to transfer the *Logos* from "above" into what was formerly the sheer radiance of the "naturally" natural, to transfer being from nature into technology.

Nature is not simply trees, mountains, animals, but a state, a condition of being. Giegerich's word for nature in this sense is "wilderness"—the Mother Earth encompassing and bearing our existence, bringing forth and nourishing man and engulfing him again at his death. Nowadays this "virgin nature" is withdrawing into an expanded version of the zoo which we call the natural reserve, wildlife sanctuary or national park. On a deep level, this fact has little to do with the spreading of civilization and the like: i.e., what we are witnessing is not merely a quantitative change, but something much more radical—a world shaking qualitative change in the relationship of nature to man and, by the same token, a fundamental transformation in the very *notion* of nature. Today, nature

is rapidly becoming "man's problem child" inasmuch as we are enjoined to guarantee her survival. "It is as if nature had become senile and helpless and now were utterly dependent on the care of her grown-up children, or as if she were on welfare requiring our planning and support." To Giegerich this means that an "ontological annihilation" of nature is taking place, "nature's denaturation", for in the very moment nature needs protection (stewardship), it is no longer nature in the true sense. The point is not that nature needs protection because we ruthlessly exploit the wilderness, but rather because the fate of nature herself is now in the hands of man.[13]

Now, just as nature (in the ontological sense) is something more than an assemblage of natural things, so is technology not simply a set of utensils and machines, but a way in which the totality of the world, the world as world, can *be*. There were technological discoveries and machines in antiquity, but they were not "technological" in our sense of the word for every discovery was embedded in myth. The inventors were gods and heroes (Prometheus), the *protoi heuretai*. Modern technology is something qualitatively different; it is technological *civilization*, a totalitarian framework embracing human existence in its entirety. Our entire being and our understanding of being is technologized and oriented toward technologicality. Technology has become its own goal, the goal we are called to serve. The common view of technology as instrumental (neutral in respect to human volition) is therefore obsolete. Technology is primarily and fundamentally an ontological event destined to change the very essence and meaning of reality.

To be sure, says Giegerich, we still have our poets and painters, forests and brooks, but nature in its deepest sense (wilderness) belongs to the past. Art, like *mythos*, exists objectively only on the basis of nature and, inversely, nature exists only on the basis of art and *mythos*. In this respect the great lyric poetry of a Goethe proves nothing. Nature did not die subsequent to the death of forests. She essentially died when Plutarch's words "the Great Pan is dead" negatively certified the decline of the nature-gods. The Incarnation positively sealed Plutarch's words through the instauration of a new, entirely different God. The empty space, formerly occupied by genies (spirits, etc.), has been taken over by *genius*, the subjective, feeling "I," the sorcerer who attempts to re-animate nature. The nature poetry of our geniuses however can no longer embody objective truth because there can be no objective nature in the absence of nature gods. Both *anima* and poetry have been exorcised from nature. After the death of the Gods, nature is either its own spectre or an organization of forces, cells, molecules and particles.

Nature, art, symbols today exist only in the form of subjective experiences, leisure, antiquities. *A rose was a rose was a rose. . . .* As James Hillman has shown, the fowl and the pig are no longer animals but rather egg-producing and meat-producing machines.[14] All this however, is neither wrong and immoral nor right and good, just as rain or sunshine is neither wrong nor right. For no one in particular is responsible, there is no guilty party. It is simply the new truth of being: the flesh has become technological including the literal flesh of a pig.[15]

The Manufactured God

Earlier we alluded to the need to prove the existence of God. In Giegerich's opinion, this effort, far from being a purely intellectual game (in contrast to piety), is itself a form of true piety. We must not think of the proofs of God as an intellectual need for certainty; on the contrary, our need for certainty should be seen as a hint that God demands a real objective existence. God did not want to remain in the "state" of *Logos* (pure Idea): he wanted to become flesh.

There is an elemental dynamism propelling this whole process. The need to prove the existence of God is not a human necessity at all (the Medieval monks had no doubt in this regard). Rather we are witnessing here the Christian essence of God instinctively thrusting itself into consciousness. To be sure, this is not a "natural" instinct (like, for example, sexuality); it is *Logos* that wants to become flesh and precisely because it is *Logos* it announces itself at first in the form of logical argumentation.[16]

In the common view, modernity is mainly associated with man's liberation from Christianism. Giegerich believes the opposite is true. Modern man has renounced Christianism only to the extent that the latter is identified with a simplistic and literal approach to the Bible. If however by Christianism we understand an existential quest possessing and obsessing Western man, we must aver that in the emergence of modernity and science, Christianism has found its true essence and has come into its own.

It is customary to identify science with rationality, consciousness, and mathematical calculation. This is legitimate only from a purely formal point of view. When we observe the unprecedented dynamism and unrest accompanying scientific developments in all areas of life, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that this drive, far from being rational, is in the highest degree irrational; it is sheer instinct, possession, passion, monomania. Giegerich is not referring to the personal passion of a particular investigator, but to the passion of Western humanity. This means that science, unbeknownst

to itself, is a true religion in the double sense of careful observation (*relegere*) and of the archetypal dominants binding (*religare*) our perceptions, thinking, and behavior. The scientific instinct is the same religious instinct, the same unconscious impulse that stimulated medieval Schoolmen to prove the existence of God—a God whose essence consists precisely in demanding proof because proving (as logical argumentation) itself constitutes the real and indispensable form of worship. The concerns of Scholasticism and science are the same; only the shape assumed by the latter has decisively changed. Science has not abandoned Christianism; rather it is the Christian Church that has deserted science. The Church renounced its own child, its own living and developing Christian truth and has chosen to remain pure *Logos* (dogma, metaphysical doctrine, faith, inner experience).

When Giegerich suggests that the basic concerns of Christianism and science are identical, he means that science no longer demands the literal-Scholastic proof of God by means of logical deduction, for this kind of literalism really misses the point. A proof that is exclusively logical remains a matter of thought and does not affect the fleshly reality. *Logos* remains *Logos* (logical). Science has understood that there is only one way of proving something. An absolute God who is no longer obvious (as in myth) can be *proved only by manufacturing him*. *Logos* becomes flesh only through fabrication just as the presentation of a house becomes true only in the process of building it.[17] The task which science and technology unconsciously try to accomplish is to build, manufacture, and simulate God in actuality (in flesh). It is a continuing process of God's incarnation and at the same time the empirical proof of his existence by means of created physical reality (artificial technological nature).

An objection may be raised that a manufactured God, though empirically provable, cannot be a transcendent, other-worldly God, a creator; he himself would be a creature. Moreover, what would happen to a faith that believes what it sees not? Giegerich agrees that the manufactured God must remain a transcendent God. The only question is: how are we to understand words like "transcendent," "absolute," "other-worldly," "invisible" (non-sensual) and "creator"? If by "transcendence" etc. we mean that God has nothing whatsoever to do with the empirical reality, then of course he would be irrelevant. Clearly a transcendent God must be also in some sense immanent.

Transcendence, according to Giegerich, should not be conceived literally and metaphysically, but as a quality within reality, as another "style" of reality. The manufactured God is an empirical

absolute, an immanent transcendence, a sensibly given non-sensible. It is the technological world—artificial, unnatural—that transcends the natural world. It is the artificially made world that is progressively "absolutized," i.e., released from nature as the self-evidently given. For example, when we learn from physics that a piece of wood, completely contrary to its natural-sensible appearance, is in fact empty space, we are indeed in the presence of the empirical nonsensuous transcendence. It can be said therefore without further ado that scientific knowledge is realized faith, faith that believes what it sees not. Natural science, empirically speaking, is pure *super*-naturalism.[18]

Inflation of Things-Images

Giegerich operates with Jung's definition of religion as symbolic life—a life in which we participate via ritual. Symbolic life is not exclusively *our*life, *our* subjectivity. For next to the subjective and the personal there is an objective-psychical "spiritual life" which claims us; it is an *autonomous* life which uses us (like the drama uses the actors) for its own needs and is indifferent to *our* interests and concerns. For example, the Pueblo Indians see themselves as the sons of the Father, the Sun whom they must assist by helping him daily to rise over the horizon and to walk across Heaven. They do not do it for themselves only: ". . .we do it for America, we do it for the whole world."[19] Referring to the modern world, Jung says: "There is no symbolic existence in which I am something other, in which I play a role, my role as one of the actors in divine drama."[20]

Giegerich (respectfully) disagrees with Jung. The truth of the matter is that there is *today* a symbolic life in Jung's sense. We sacrifice two thirds of our available time to symbolic life without recognizing it as such. Here are some instances.

Millions of people sit every evening for hours in front of their TV sets. They imagine they do so for pleasure but that is only a pretense hiding the objective state of affairs. The cult of TV is not due to a natural human need; man is not naturally oriented toward entertainment. *Circa* 1700 there were no newspapers, no cinema and the only books to be found in the average household were the Bible, hymnal and, occasionally an Almanac. These books were read over and over again—sheer, endless monotony from our standpoint. Moreover there was no such thing as "free" time after the workday, but celebration-time (*Feierabend*, Holy-day).

In Giegerich's scheme of things, the provenance of TV is not human. Behind this phenomenon there is an objective necessity; television does not serve *our* need to be entertained—we serve

television. In its objective being TV is *show*, show as *theatrum mundi*—a mixture of world records, Westerns, Oscars, quizzes, summit conferences. It is the theatre of life in its heights and depths, in its spectacularity and banality. Man, the consumer, is used so as to replace the absolute God as the indifferent spectator with a God who is carnally represented in real life. There must be TV for the *divina comedia* to have real existence in the flesh. That television has nothing to do with the satisfaction of personal pleasure is betrayed by the fact that it often remains on when nobody is watching. The divine show must go on.

Before we turn to other instances of symbolic life it would be helpful to observe with Giegerich that the destruction of mythical imagination has by no means eliminated the imaginal. What has happened is that the image has undergone a fundamental change in quality: it has been intensified to the point of becoming "a distillate of image."[21] There has been an unprecedented inflation of the image; in effect we now live, says Giegerich, in an "absurdly imagistic time": posters, magazines, prints, art books, comics, TV, advertising, printed fabrics and wallpaper.

In mythical cultures, the image always conveyed *something*, a numinous Other which manifested itself immediately in the image, shining forth from it. By contrast, contemporary images are absolutely indifferent to *what* they show. Beethoven's Ninth Symphony can be the musical background for a soup commercial, a cognac commercial or a political party. What matters is pure *show*. This however is not exploitation of image and it would be inappropriate for us to react with moral indignation. "We must try to appreciate. . .television [etc.] as the modern form of image worship—as the authentic and only possible way to worship the image of the Christian God."

God's prohibition to make any "graven image" is only directed against natural deities, not against the pictorial representations of Jahweh himself. What is rejected is the worship of the natural inasmuch as it claims to be substantial and divine (imaginal). Concurrently, what is demanded is the cult of a God image that has left all traces of the natural behind and has no substantial content. "This," says Giegerich, "exactly corresponds to the new nature of God who has shaken off his natural reality and purified himself into an idealized 'unreal' abstraction, into an image in the public relations sense of the word. The Christian God's existence is not substantial; it lies solely in his prestige, the effect of his 'public relations', in his being believed by his 'true believers', his 'fans'."

The only difference between Christian and pagan worship is that the Christian God "does not have the sensual shape of natural phenomena or of a cast, painted, or carved image, but rather the abstract and absolute shape of image per se: the image of public relations. The numinosity once invested in *what* the image manifested now belongs to the 'image for the sake of image.' We need images, more and more images, no matter what of." What matters is prestige as such, the praise of the *name* for the name's sake. We can say therefore with Giegerich that ". . .*any* activity cultivating the prestige of something (. . .) is an enactment of God's nature and as such a sacred act—the cult of worship of *our* God image."[22]

Another example of symbolic life is advertising, which like television, has its predestined place in the new dispensation. Advertising replaces mythical poetry as the praise of the uncreated nature and its many Gods. It is the glorification of products, a hymn to production, i.e., a hymn to creation and the creator-God. Here Christianism ceases to be a purely subjective attitude and is transformed into an absolute existence imposing its reality upon us even against our will. "Advertising is the *constant proclamation of salvation and the constant confirmation in the belief in salvation.*"[23]

Speaking about computers, Giegerich stresses that their meaning goes beyond facilitating work. First, computers simulate the mighty vision of the enfleshed God as the *noēsis noēsēos*, thought thinking itself, i.e., thought that is fully autonomous and self-sufficient. Second, computers are the realization of God as the *intuitus originarius* (creative intuition). Our finite thinking proceeds discursively; we can only think one thought after another whereas God's thinking can grasp the whole at once, in one single glance. Computers simulate this procedure as well as they can under the conditions of temporality. The basic drive behind the computer industry is the vision of manufacturing God as the Omniscient, for the goal is the total storing of all information. We must note however that this is not a question about *our* omniscience: in point of fact, thanks to computers, we are becoming more and more nescient. Storage takes place for the sake of omniscience as such.

The transcendent, other-worldly standpoint of God acquires empirical existence also in the form of satellites and space travel. Whenever television shows us on a daily basis the satellite weather map we celebrate this transcendent standpoint.[24] The spy-flights which from the heights of many miles can spot golf-balls on the ground simulate the all-seeing eye of God under the conditions of empirical life (cf. Psalm 139, 7). The few examples we have adduced show that technology has the task of producing God's predicates in

a literal way, physically, in actuality. The divine predicates must no longer be *nomina, flatus voci* but *realia.*

Giegerich insists that it would be misleading to look for a special God in each of these inventions. We find plurality of different Gods, divine images, only in the things of nature. Technology as a whole is directed toward the erection of one, absolute, total, all-encompassing God—the God of technology. In a letter to me, Giegerich clarifies his position as follows: "The event of technology as a whole means the end of eachness, the end of cosmos and the victory of uni-verse. . .Concrete objects, tables, cars, shoes, tin cans, plastic now have their nature in being throw-away objects, and only abstract Technology as a whole has divine value."[24a]

To be truly a creator, to attain his full being, the God of technology must subdue everything that appears from itself, i.e., everything natural. It belongs to his very essence to conquer, extensively as well as intensively, a people, a culture, one realm of being after another, for his dynamism lies in his lack of being. Only what is artificial assumes a confrontational stance in the presence of the natural, converting it into an object. The essence of a manufactured God consists in opposing and overcoming the natural. And the technological civilization *is* capable of overpowering the natural world because for this civilization things have become empirically evident. Every thing is a fusion of heaven and earth in one point (*perichoresis*). In a word, the very being of the artificial (the technological) is power and violence-violation. On another occasion, Giegerich singles out Goethe's Faust II as an allegory of the modern man and his inhospitality toward natural images. "Faust is the depriving, robbing one. So his name (fist) is not without deeper significance. Embodying the principle of literal activism, Faust is characterized by the empty fist that needs to grab in order to be."[25]

Giegerich rejects any attempt to explain technology as the product of human pride—that would be to ignore facts. Technology is our burden, an exacted duty whether we like it or not. It is the destiny of the West and possibly of the world as a whole, so that every kind of moralistic valuation is pointless. The true *hubris* seems to consist precisely in trying to interpret technology in personalistic-moralistic terms, i.e., by conceiving it as human accomplishment. The merely human standpoint must be left behind if we are to understand this astonishing, monstrous, incredible phenomenon in the face of which we are becoming increasingly perplexed and helpless as it develops in its purity.

When we observe the behavior of twentieth century man we see the very opposite of *hubris*—an unusual modesty, discretion,

humility, even shame. We no longer have kings representing our highest self. We have dispensed with servants; we identify with the needy, the oppressed. We see ourselves as needy: we like to appear sloppy and wear sneakers, blue jeans and T-shirts. We prefer to be photographed in snap shots so as to avoid posturing and ostentation. It is nearly impossible for us to "talk big" and at best we *tolerate* the sublime in the form of parody, satire, persiflage, irony. In all these instances Giegerich detects an unconscious defensive posture on the part of modern man and woman. We are anxious to avoid the danger of inflation because God, enfleshed in technology, is, in an uncanny way, exceedingly near and real. We must make ourselves small, appear shy in the presence of the Holy.

In reality, however, it is not human beings that are inflated but technical things. Things are becoming increasingly *logos*-like: they acquire ever more numerous divine attributes and autonomy. Things—the camera, car, stereo—are now the *fascinosum*, because they are invested with soul. For example, the senseless urge to buy and to consume, in Giegerich's view, is nothing less than an unconscious, unacknowledged act of devotion. The same applies to the phenomenon of a society built on planned obsolescence: it is as if things wanted to be bought as a way of receiving our tribute but do not wish to be at *our* disposal and for *our* enjoyment. They become worthless, i.e., they withdraw so as to remain autonomous. A similar situation obtains in the case of sight-seeing: every tourist must take a picture for the millionth time of this castle or that Greek temple. Things themselves demand reverence—a reverence which is long overdue considering the fact that we still prefer to dwell—neurotically—in pre-Incarnation mentality.

In all these and many other ways, spiritual life withdraws from human beings and is transferred to things. Things become dominant (prestigious) and human beings—mere servants. The place of events and decisions is surrendered to technology and the world of things acquires spontaneity, a numinous-irrational power of its own.[26]

Exteriorization

In one of his letters Jung relates that during an expedition in Kenya the party took a native into the jeep who had never seen a car. After a while the native asked the diver to stop the car and stretched himself on the ground, saying that he had to wait for his soul to catch up.[27]

We confuse the situation of the native with our own. We still assume that it is we who, thanks to our rational and technological

development, have surpassed the soul. Like the native, we the moderns, believe that the soul resides in what we have forsaken long ago: in nature, in the life of instinct and sexuality, in the earth, in myths and religions. The truth is that our soul has left all those things; *she* travels in the jeep, *she* sits at the steering wheel, whereas we have stepped out, and wait for the soul to catch up from behind, i.e., from everything that by now lies in the past. Actually however, we haven't stepped out at all for it is impossible to ignore the direction of history. We have stepped out only in fantasy. In reality Giegerich says we have been driving for hundreds of years with our backs turned against the direction of locomotion. No wonder, then, that we bemoan our alienation.[28]

Nature, mythos, the ancient Gods are really dead. And, as Hölderlin knew, it is not only forbidden but also impossible to awaken the dead. We believe that we are still living on earth whereas in truth our *anima* circles around the earth in our satellites in cold empty space. Instead of looking up from the earth to the sky, we look at our earth from above. Giegerich does not deny that our deep sense of communion with nature and our appreciation of the cultural treasures of the past are valuable human emotions. But insofar as these feelings are nothing more than sentimental nature romanticism and nostalgia for the lost world of myth, they have the effect of a lullaby. They foster the delusion that the past harbors *eternal* truths, that Mother Earth is indestructible, that the old values are stable. It is clear, however, that the air and the oceans will not be cleaned up, that the destroyed rain forests will never grow again. Apart from these ontic (empirical or physical) destructions, nature has been long since destroyed in its ontological essence. Man's attitude toward the world as a whole has radically changed because it has become possible first, to literally-physically leave the earth and second, to destroy life on earth, even the planet-earth itself.

In spite of all this we are still immersed in medieval states of mind. As we solemnly deliberate about self-actualization a truly human society (love of the neighbor), about a whole nature, etc., milliards are spent on industrialization, armaments, development of computers and space exploration. We manage to convince ourselves that people who are responsible for these excesses are the repressive holders of power, the plundering bosses of industry, the hybrid technocrats. In Giegerich's opinion, our attitudes in this respect are completely neurotic. The right hand refuses to know what the left hand is doing. But—just as the left hand is *our* hand, so these people are *our* industry bosses and *our* technocrats; it is they who carry our shadow for us so that our consciousness may

pretend to be immaculate. We belong to the very technocrats whom we loathe.

There is an infallible sign as to the true place of the soul: "Where your treasure is, there is your heart" (Matt. 6, 21). Where money accumulates, there is the soul. For the soul, according to the tenets of archetypal psychology, is not the private, noncommittal psyche of the individual, but the real, the collective unconscious in Jung's sense, the contemporary world of archetypal images. We should not be misled by the apparently rational character of technology. Technology is not the opposite of instinct and unconscious psyche but another style of unconscious. It is not the case that our consciousness has become rationalistic, calculative and so on; in point of fact, it is still very much entangled in idealistic, nostalgic, sentimental attitudes. What has happened is that instinctual psychic life has changed its language and its medium from a mythical to a rationalistic style. The objective (collective) psyche today is represented by technology. Technology is *our* nature, our new earth, our instinct, our body, our spiritual, symbolic life.

Hillman has pointedly observed that "technology is cursed by our mechanical idea of it. It is the great repressed, the unconscious . . ."[29] Giegerich, for his part, is convinced that technology is the new place of real, factual happenings. It is here—in the world of technology—that the real wind blows, a mighty *pneuma* of extraordinary dynamism. Once again, therefore, recognition and apology is overdue; we must admit that technology is "*our* place of 'soul-making', *our* form of alchemical opus and *our* place of theophany."[30]

As technology lost its connection with our consciousness and conscious development, our consciousness became alienated from technology. Scientists, condemned to the narrow confines of experimentation, have been unable to realize the true dimensions of their endeavor; they did not know that they were in effect the trustees of the Incarnation and that the administration of the Christian truth had been passed over to them together with the managers of industry and the advertising establishment.

We refuse to grant science and technology a psychological and theological reality and then—lo and behold—we are surprised that they are soulless and godless. We are doubly alienated: first, from *mythos* and nature because the objective psyche which formerly resided in these realms has been transferred to the technology; second, from technology as our contemporary nature and mythology because we have remained nostalgically bound to nature.[31]

In an effort to clarify what is at stake, Giegerich distinguishes between what he calls "Sunday-truth" and "work-day truth." From the perspective of Sunday-truth, religion means faith in the historical Jesus as the Christ, as "my personal savior." Here everything hinges on man as person, on his interior (inner being), on his moral sentiments, his faith. In this view, man or the idea of man becomes psychologically the highest value and provides the foundation for individualism, interiority, etc., in short, for *hubris* of consciousness (Jung called it "monotheism of consciousness").

Western ways of thinking and experiencing are steeped in the precincts of Sunday-truth; we despise the work-day truth which nonetheless determines the real, "the bottom line" circumstances of our existence. We allow ourselves the luxury of freedom of thought, i.e., the luxury of subjective and arbitrary *Weltanschauung* and religion whereas what really counts (and secretly we know it) is not *our* thinking ("our opinion") but what our "real behavior thinks." We live on two planes: we spend colossal sums of money for "culture" (theater, restorations, concerts, antiquities) without realizing that these cultural endeavors do not affect our real lives for they belong to the compartment "leisure-time" which is completely divorced from the compartment "work-time" or the "real world."

Giegerich urges us to recognize that the values of humanism, freedom, individualism (including the Jungian "individuation"), interiority, etc. are "the untruth of the West." We are not Indians who can find truth in the Self (Atman) and for whom it is entirely legitimate to downgrade matter and material reality. What for the Indians is truth, for the West is a sojourn in the lie-neurosis. Occidental truth is the opposite of that of India: it is the Incarnation, a movement into *outer reality*, conceived by Giegerich as *the* manifestation of objective psyche. The greatness of the Occident lies in the production of ever bigger collective, objectively real, autonomous-anonymous structures: physics, technology, industry, multi-national combines, consumer society, advertising, bureaucracy, statistics. For all "practical purposes" this *is* the direction of the Western libido and it is in this direction that we find *our* truth, our meaning, our *anima*. However, as we saw, the Westerner appears to be incapable or unwilling to choose between Sunday-truth and work-day truth. As long as this kind of paranoia persists, Christianism is bound to remain unredeemed. For only exteriorization, i.e., moving without reserve in the direction of our collective and objective reality (technology) can be the redemption and cure of the Christian *res religiosa*.

Incarnation is fulfilled in total exteriorization which, for Giegerich, is the crucifixion. Crucifixion is itself incarnation, complete immersion in earthly reality. God ceases to exist: "My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me." God is now fully enfleshed and there is no escape hatch supplying the hope that his former metaphysical status may be restored. Resurrection is not the return of the old (God) but the resurrection of the *crucified* and God-less. In this sense resurrection, instead of making exteriorization retrograde, seals it. God is not dead, he continues to exist; it is only that in the event of his Incarnation-Crucifixion he has changed his Gestalt and his place. Once again he is as the mythical Gods used to be—a non-metaphysical innerworldly God. The only difference is that he no longer dwells in nature but in the artificial world of technological civilization (second nature). In view of this it is flagrantly unjust, notes Giegerich, to refer to our technological civilization as being secular or godless. Technology is not the *seculum* but, quite to the contrary, *civitas dei.*

Indeed one can say that Christianism has brought the fullness of grace, provided we do not understand "grace" in the banal sense of personal well-being (sanctification), but as the real presence of God. The things of technology *are* the empirical presence of the absolute God. And our age is the most Christian because it enacts the fulfillment of the Christian truth—the real enfleshment of God. Seen from the work-day perspective, Occidental man has lived extremely piously; he has been faithful (to the manufactured God) almost unto death if one considers the threat of nuclear holocaust and the progressive destruction of environment. It is as if the motto of technicalization were: *fiat deus, sed pereat mundus.*

Giegerich speculates (to my mind somewhat wistfully) that the transition from natural Gods to the absolute God (replacement of nature by the artificial world of technology) perhaps would not have assumed such *literally* catastrophic proportions if the entrance of the pre-existing *Logos* into work-day servitude had been accompanied by a similar movement of the part of the human *Logos*—the soul, heart, consciousness. Western humanity, by fully immersing itself into the world of technology, would have faced technological reality not in a neurotic way (not as the *seculum*), but, like archaic humanity, would have found its own place in the very midst of this earthly reality. As a result, the crucifixion would have been followed not only by resurrection but also by a *descensus ad infernos* (descent into the realm of shadows) and an ascension to heaven. The new artificial "earth" which was brought by Christianism would have appeared again, suffused with imagination and transparent to

heaven. Christianism and the technical world would have become psychological and thus have been recognized once again as our objective psyche (*anima mundi*). In a word, it would be a return of "animism"—not however in its pristine state but in the altogether new form of technological reality—as a kind of new primitivism.

In conclusion, Giegerich insists that it is not sufficient to use technology in a sparing, frugal way just as it is ineffectual to practice Christian love of the neighbor in the work place and in the neighborhood. That would be trying to dignify technology and the work-day from Sunday's perspective only. A really incarnated *Logos* demands real tribute: its enfleshment must be accomplished—even onto Good Friday—in *us* (in our consciousness) as well. This means that the *Logos* must take its abode beneath matter, beneath the things of technology; it must find in these things the place of its truth, its meaning, its soul, its God. The *Logos* must also give up the belief in the other-worldly God as well as in Christ as "my personal savior." For only a complete burial of the soul (*Logos*) in technology can bring about the rehabilitation-redemption of the shadow.[33]

NOTES

[1] Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis," *Science*, 10 March, 1967, Vol. 115, Number 3717, pp. 1205-1206.

[2] See Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1972), pp. 454-55.

[3] Wolfgang Giegerich, "Die Rettung des Kindes oder die Entwendung der Zeit," *Gorgo* 5/1981. p. 114. Author's trans.

[4] Giegerich, "Das Begräbnis der Seele in die technische Zivilisation," *Eranos Jahrbuch* 1983, Vol. 52, pp. 211-276. My article is mainly a paraphrase of Giegerich's essay and there is no attempt on my part to intersperse it with adventitious thoughts or being critical. Besides "The Burial of the Soul" Giegerich is the author of numerous lectures held at The C. G. Jung Institute in Stuttgart as well as at the Eranos Conferences, Ascona, Switzerland. Dr. Giegerich received his university training in Würzburg and Göttingen, Germany, and Berkeley, California. He was assistant professor of German literature at Rutgers University from 1969-1972. He is now editor of *Gorgo*, a journal which delves into the meaning of terrorism and the current ecological crisis, linking these subjects to the imagination and to the loss of soul. He has just completed a major book entitled *Psychoanalysis of the Nuclear Bomb*.

[5] C. G. Jung, *CW* 18, par. 279.

[6] See Jung, *CW* 11, par. 211; pars. 250, 251; 9i, pars. 195-97.

[7] Giegerich, "The Nuclear Bomb and the Fate of God," *Spring*, 1985, p. 15.

[8] Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, rev. ed. (New York: Pantheon, 1973), p. 25 ff; cf. *CW* 18, par. 688.

[9] See Giegerich, "Das Begräbnis der Seele," *op. cit.*, pp. 223-26.

[10] See *ibid.*, pp. 233-34.

[11] Giegerich, "The Nuclear Bomb and the Fate of God," *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10. Giegerich traces this development to the story of the Golden Calf in the Old Testament. See "The Nuclear Bomb and the Fate of God," *op. cit.*, pp. 1-27.; cf. Giegerich, "Busse für Philemon: Vertiefung in das verdorbene Gast-Spiel der Götter" (*Eranos Jahrbuch* 1982, Vol. 51, pp. 189-242.)

[13]See Giegerich, "Saving the Nuclear Bomb," *Facing Apocalypse*, ed. by Valerie Andrews et al. (Dallas, Texas: Spring Publications, Inc., 1987), pp. 100 ff.

[14] See James Hillman, "The Animal Kingdom in the Human Dream," *Eranos Jahrbuch* 1982, Vol. 50.

[15]See Giegerich, "Das Begräbnis der Seele," *op. cit.*, pp. 244-45. Giegerich consistently distinguishes between "ontic" and "ontological." "Ontic" refers to existing realities, events, behaviors and in some contexts to the empirical and literal levels of meaning. "Ontological" refers to Being and to the modes of Being that particular literal entities may be in. At times he equates "ontological" with the metaphorical/archetypal and the imaginal (in contrast to the imaginary). For example, the things of nature, even though they may be ontically very much alive, may nevertheless be said to be ontologically dead from the moment when they ceased to be the dwelling place of Gods, nymphs, daimons, and turned into objects of physics. Natural objects are ontologically dead when they no longer have a numinous shine, radiance.

[16] See *ibid.*, pp. 245-47.

[17] See *ibid.*, pp. 249-50.

[18] See *ibid.*, pp. 151-52.

[19] Jung, *CW* 18, pars. 625, 629.

[20] *Ibid*, par. 628.

[21] Giegerich, "The Nuclear Bomb and the Fate of God," *op. cit.*, p. 17.

[22] *Ibid*, pp. 18-19.

[23] *Ibid*, p. 20.

[24] See Giegerich, "Das Begräbnis der Seele," op. cit., pp. 255-56.

[24a] Giegerich, private communication, Oct. 3, 1986.

[25] Giegerich, "Hospitality Toward the Gods in an Ungodly Age," *Spring* 1984, —. 69.

[26] See Giegerich, "Das Begräbnis der Seele," *op. cit.*, pp. 257-60.

[27] See Jung, *Briefe* III, p. 376.

[28] See Giegerich, "Das Begräbnis der Seele," *op. cit.*, p. 261.

[29]Hillman, "The Imagination of the Air and the Collapse of Alchemy," *Eranos Jahrbuch* 1981, Vol. 50, p. 327.

[30] See Giegerich, "Das Begräbnis der Seele," *op. cit.*, pp. 262-65.

[31] See *ibid.*, pp. 265-66.

[32] See *ibid.*, pp. 267-71. In a personal communication Giegerich points out that the "Sunday-truth" and the "work-day truth" belong to two different levels. The higher level (the work-day truth) does not completely invalidate the lower level (the Sunday-truth); it only relativizes the latter. "We now live in a divided, two-layer reality; the first reality is that of personal psychology, the second that of collective or transpersonal psychology. . . .Archaic man did not have a personal psychology in the sense we do. Today it is possible for us to have two separate truths, that of our science and that of our faith or feeling. As long as we *know* that our faith or feeling are valid only on the level of our personal, subjective psychology, it is authentic." (Letter Oct. 3, 1986).

[33] See Giegerich, "Das Begräbnis der Seele," *op. cit.*, pp. 273-76.

GARY SNYDER

Walking the New York Bedrock Alive in the Sea of Information

from Mountains of Rivers Without End

Maple, oak, poplar, ginkgo
New leaves, "new green" on a rock ledge
Of steep little uplift, tucked among trees
Hot sun dapple—
wake up.

Roll over and slide down the rockface
Walk away in the woods toward
A squirrel, toward
Rare people! Seen from a safe distance,
A murmur of traffic approaching,
Siren howls echoing
Through the gridlock of structures,
Vibrating with helicopters,
the bass tone
Of a high jet.

Leap over the park stone wall
Dressed fast and light,
Slip into the migrating flow

New York like a sea anemone
Wide and waving in the Sea of Economy,
Cadres of educated youth in chic costume
Step out to the night life, good food, after work
In the chambers of prana-subtle power-pumping
Heartbeat buildings fired
Deep at the bottom, under the basement.
Fired by old merchant marine
Ex-fire tenders gone now from sea
To the ships stood on end on the land,

Ex-seamen stand watch at the stationary boilers
give way to computers,
That monitor heat and power
Webs underground; in the air;
In the Sea of Information.

Keen eyes on the sidewalks,
Brisk flesh. Beauty and age strut and shuffle

We curve round the sweep of great corners
Cardboard chunks tossed up in truckbed
Delicate jiggle, rouge on the nipple,
Kohl under the eye.

Time and Life buildings—sixty thousand people—
Wind ripples the banners.
Stiff shudder shakes limbs on the
Planted trees growing new green,

Glass, aluminum, aggregate gravel,
Iron. Stainless steel.
Hollow honeycomb brain-buildings owned by

Columbia University, the landlord of
Anemone
Colony
Alive, in the Sea of Information

"Claus the Wild man"
Lived mostly with Indians,
Was there as a witness when the old lady
"Karacapacomont"
Sold the last bit of Washington Heights, 1701

Down deep grates hear the watercourse,
Rivers that never give up
Trill under the roadbed, over the bedrock
A bird angles way off a brownstone
Couloir that looks like a route,

Echo the hollowing darkness.
Scatter on bedrock, crisscrossing light threads

Gleam sucking squeals up the side streets
One growl shadow
    in an egg of bright lights,
Lick of black on the tongue.
Echoes of sirens come down the walled canyons
Foot lifts to the curb and the lights change—
And look up at the Gods
Equitable god, Celanese god, noble line,
Old Union Carbide god,
Each catching shares of the squared blocked shadow
Each swinging in sun-dial arc of the day
More than the sum of its parts.
The Guggenheims, the Rockefellers, and the Fricks,
Assembling the art of the world, the plate glass
Window lets light in on "the water lilies"
Like fish or planets, people,
Move, pause, move through the rooms,
White birch leaves shiver in breezes
While guards watch the world,
Helicopters making their long humming trips
Trading pollen and nectar
In the air
        Of the
Sea of Economy,

    Drop under the streetworld
    Steel squeal of stopping and starting
    Wind blows through black tunnels
    Spiderwebs, fungus, lichen.

Ginkgo trees of Gondwanaland. Pictographs,
Petroglyphs, cover the subways—
Empty eye sockets of buildings just built
Soul-less, they still wait the ceremony
    That will make them too,
        New, Big
        City Gods,
Provided with conduit, cable and pipe,
They will light up, breathe cool air,
Breathe the minds of the workers who work there—
The cloud of their knowing
As they soar in the sky, in the air,

Of the Sea
Of Information,

Cut across alleys and duck beneath trucks
"Under Destruction"
Stop to gaze on the large roman letters
Of writing on papers that tell of Economy,

Skilsaw whine whips through the windows
Empty room—no walls—such clear air in the cellar
Dry brick, cooked clay, rusty house bodies
Carbide blade skilsaw cuts bricks. Squalls
From the steps leading down to the subway.
Blue-chested runner, a female, on car streets,
Red lights block traffic but she like the
Beam of a streetlight in the whine of the Skilsaw,
She runs right through.

A cross street leads toward a river
North returns to the woods
South takes you fishing
Peregrines nest at the thirty-fifth floor

Streetpeople rolling their carts
of whole households
Or asleep wrapped in light blue blanket
spring evening, at dusk, in a doorway,
Eyeballing aretes and buttresses rising above them,
con domus, dominion,
domus,
condominate, condominium
Towers, up there the
Clean crisp white dress white skin
women and men
Who occupy sunnier niches,
Higher up on the layered stratigraphy cliffs, get
More photosynthesis, flow by more ostracods,
get more sushi,
Gather more flesh, have delightful
Cascading laughs,

—Peregrine sails past the window
Off the edge of the word-chain
Harvesting concepts, theologies,
Snapping up bites of the bits bred by
Banking
    ideas and wild speculations
On new information—
        and stoops in a blur on a pigeon,

As the street-bottom feeders with shopping carts
Slowly check out the air for the falling of excess,
Of too much, flecks of extra,
From the higher-up folks in the sky

As the fine dusk gleam
    Lights a whole glass side of
    Forty some stories
    Soft liquid silver,

Beautiful buildings we float in, we feed in,

    Foam, steel, gray.

Alive in the Sea of Information.

V:85-III:87

ROSANNE WASSERMAN

Four Poems

INUIT AND SEAL

for Gaëtan and Jim

Who has been drinking our air from the other side?
The veils of valentines shake, wind chimes sound, and a hole
appears
round as a nostril, deep in the lake-blue ice.

One vibration tangibly carries: sky, cobalt glass, blue glaze,
but white petunias swim away from names, alive only so long,
a fabric translucent enough to reflect all shades.

Even when we talk, our garments different shades of rose,
a tone escapes, as if a wooden spear
could not stay in the hand

without concentration,
without becoming
a bundle of sticks and an axe.

But we were bravely talking. How long did it take to form
these rooms, to articulate spaces almost not there?
Hand and eye, back bent, suspense,

and hope: beneath this layer,
a seal might give us sustenance, more than we could believe,
and it rises to breathe just long enough, just so often.

To stay cannily silent that long, till the animal
swims to its highest hunger,
putting its wet snout, warm, to a single accustomed, awaited
point,

waiting to cry *yes*, never to let
the word break through to shatter
the waiting's end,

we imagine, again,
red rising under blue,
flesh like our own.

DARK FURNITURE

for Mimi Bess

Things that are reappearing now
only pretend to repeat, repair
or remember the unholy longings
I unwittingly memorized,
or, worse, consciously thought wise
to record in some permanent system
for posterity, which does not
exist in the way I think.
No one waits to close my eyes
or break my household up,
although the mysterious objects
I fully recall having had removed
from my greedy fist when I was three
turned out to be still waiting in your bureau.

When I saw them later, again,
by, say, thirty years,
their importance was not nostalgia
but their unrecallable lure,
along with the sheer fact of *revenance.*
So my desire revalued them
to make them more worth keeping,
though few of those things
shine the way *these* do,

thirteen drops of amber chandelier glass—

mine again! mine again! Mimi,
when you pried them from my grasp
and rolled them to the back of the long dark drawer,
over its purple felt, meant to pamper silver,
you didn't know you kept them there for me.
I found them after you'd left for good,
without really saying goodbye, except
the night I dreamed of your kitchen stove:
where you stood saying "That's all right.
I thought the nurse was you.
When I died, I thought that you were there."

Mine again? past thirty years, having
learned who you were and lost you,
with nothing I wanted more from you
than seeing you alive;
but long ago I may have wanted
those smooth crystals more.

And now are they more to me than the forgotten,
found after waiting beneath the days'
bald angling into future? How had I
gotten my hands on them? For what
had they been returned? Would I have been punished
for greed, or have cut my tongue?
Did they foretell the years I'd be away before you died?

And my mother said: "those drops were her souvenirs,
removed after certain months unwove
the household where she was born,
taking dark furniture out of the place where
knowledge gave it brilliance,
where she trusted patterned days
to keep her things alight: and
darkest when the walls have been knocked down,
so that a useful formlessness uncuts the memory
from uselessness, from self, from
love, from what was there before,
from cherished or expensive things
no children ought to fondle.
Imagine that enormous chandelier!"

INTERVIEW WITH ELPENOR

"I have seen floating" says Elpenor
"blue bags in the Aegean:
cheapest plastic azure as the water
and the sky. Greece isn't wealthy
but Long Island City is bleak"

This is lunchtime Out of easy reach
he tears a peach in half and sets
one hemisphere in his teeth
He offers his audience the half with the stone

"I have never been as tired
as when we roofed that house
Thirteen hours in hot sun, heavy labor
carrying sandbags climbing ladders
until when I leaned back

over the red tiles shut my eyes
I fell asleep at once my friend called me
he thought I'd fallen off
You should have seen me then
I could have burned you with my eyes"

Wearing black well before winter
he likes dark colors soon all the women
will dress in navy blue "A darkness
moves about him when he moves"
"What is it that these men

want?" "To get down to some
real flesh" he says and turns the pages
of a catalogue of marble statues
Tell him how he makes you feel
he turns the palm

of one hand slowly on the other
"Did you ever want to touch someone
so much it made you cry?"
Speak of love and he recalls a man

so generous "he'd give you, literally

the coat off his back" Of work:
"there was nothing like working
just with him one other person
in communication building something"
Of marriage: "you are married?

Well, stay married" Of desire:
"the snow" and of imagination:
"I like to think of Socrates
that old codger walking through Athens
questioning everything"

Reading *We Always Treat Women Too Well*
he refuses to let them down
tilting a single rose to sniff
then turning it around blossom and thorn
in her entranced direction

The pigs love roses Asking your permission
he turns himself into a pig
so he can love them too
Utopian ingle! Where the pigs can weep

Wearing mirrored aviator shades
he says one day "I should
have been a shark" It tears
them up their hearts
go out they start

to feel for him can he not feel?
Wedded to what Circe did he practice
this enchantment? He should be buried
should have been buried
by his mates and comrades long ago

if he could find that one
would he not ask it?

BUSKINS AND ROBINS

You call these signs of springtime?—
the department of funny hats,
a flock of sun-white pigeons, Fort Hamilton Parkway
in the snow. A push through the heavy
turnstile tears a little more time away,
but better that than dragging it behind you.

A working season, really. Once again I've been called in
for fifty-minute stints before the gradeschool.
Between acts I retire to a lounge with
walls of croquette salmon, going downstream fast
in flight from turquoise naugahyde:
the colors of an ice-cream den,
I notice. Brushing off the Crumbs
of Coffee Break with a *serviette*,

we get to work. I call the troop,
all twelve years old or less, to come to order.
They ask for ancient news,
and call it as they see it rolling:
the flavor of the month, a revelation.
I don't have a call for this, but they're
sheer method actors, little eyases:
they call us out for panegyrics on their pantomimes,
pots and pans, pantoums, pantaloons,
pancakes, panaceas.
They rank Medusa with King Kong,
you know, or call themselves
by names like Crocodile or Twong the Wrestler.

Encourage this ability to recognize their world,
peopled with its archaisms under
the bright new awnings. Don't call them on
the carpet just for nourishing themselves.
They saw an anvil first the same way you did:
heaved from an upper story window,
after a baby grand. The hand
dare seize the thing was Daffy Duck's.

As I call on another young
sweetheart, this one barely three feet high,
I recognize eternal return
requires a stern recall
of how those worms are hiding,

not of where. The first plump fellow
has three months before he resurrects,
and yet its knell whirs in some crimson throat,
like that one over that way, see?—
he's wearing a little knit muffler,
and whistling that old sweet song,
"The Weather's Bound to Change."

TERRY YANK

Six Photographs

JOHN YAU

The Photographs of Terry Yank: An Introduction

There are four people involved: a woman and a boy are fighting with each other, an older woman is looking on, and a young girl is lying face down on the boardwalk, as if she is fantasizing about something only she can see. The photograph frames the turbulence so that the boardwalk tilts slightly. In her exploration of the relationship of children, adolescents, and adults with each other, Terry Yank is always conscious of how to integrate both the action and her vision of it. The placement of her subjects, their gestures and stances, within the rectangle is carefully considered, and in this regard she can be compared to a choreographer.

An extreme sensitivity to placement is common to the strongest street photographers. Rather than approaching her subjects from a predetermined distance or set angle, she must find the place where the action and her vision of it merge into a highly resolved image. At the same time, she is conscious of the effects of light and dark, sunlight and shadow. In her photograph of an adolescent boy in a uniform, she uses a flash in daylight, causing his face to be both pulled forward from the picture plane and isolated just enough from the rest of the picture so as to become the focal point of our attention.

The photographs transcend the documentary because of Yank's response to the placement and relationship of figures to each other and to the environment. Everything in the photograph gains a resonance that goes beyond the depicted moment. A young girl with outstretched arms resembles a puppet on strings. This metaphor is contextualized by the soldiers marching by. Between the soldiers and the young girl stands a woman holding a baby. The curve of the baby's head and back rhymes with the posture of the closest soldier. The photograph frames a possible future by being attentive to the peculiarities of a moment.

"No ideas but in things," Williams wrote. Yank is a street photographer who uses the camera to explore the kinds of control one attempts to enforce over another. What is disturbing about her vision is that the primary characters are parents and children. Her photographs convey the terror and aggressiveness simmering beneath the surface of seemingly straightforward moments of intimacy. A man holding a child rolls on a beach.

Octavio Paz

I Speak of the City

for Eliot Weinberger

(Tr. from the Spanish by Eliot Weinberger)

a novelty today, tomorrow a ruin from the past, buried and resurrected every day,

lived together in streets, plazas, buses, taxis, movie houses, theaters, bars, hotels, pigeon coops and catacombs,

the enormous city that fits in a room three yards square, and endless as a galaxy,

the city that dreams us all, that all of us build and unbuild and rebuild as we dream,

the city we all dream, that restlessly changes while we dream it,

the city that wakes every hundred years and looks at itself in the mirror of a word and doesn't recognize itself and goes back to sleep,

the city that sprouts from the eyelids of the woman who sleeps at my side, and is transformed,

with its monuments and statues, its histories and legends,

into a fountain made of countless eyes, and each eye reflects the same landscape, frozen in time,

before schools and prisons, alphabets and numbers, the altar and the law:

the river that is four rivers, the orchard, the tree, the Female and Male, dressed in wind—

to go back, go back, to be clay again, to bathe in that light, to sleep under those votive lights,

to float on the waters of time like the flaming maple leaf the current drags along,

to go back—are we asleep or awake?—we are, we are nothing more, day breaks, it's early,

we are in the city, we cannot leave, except to fall into another city, different yet identical,

I speak of the immense city, that daily reality composed of two words: *the others*,

and in every one of them there is an I clipped from a we, an I adrift,

I speak of the city built by the dead, inhabited by their stern ghosts, ruled by their despotic memory,

the city I talk to when I talk to nobody, the city that dictates these insomniac words,

I speak of towers, bridges, tunnels, hangars, wonders and disasters,

the abstract State and its concrete police, the schoolteachers, jailers, preachers,

the shops that have everything, where we spend everything, and it all turns to smoke,

the markets with their pyramids of fruit, the turn of the seasons, the sides of beef hanging from the hooks, the hills of spices and the towers of bottles and preserves,

all of the flavors and colors, all the smells and all the stuff, the tide of voices—water, metal, wood, clay—the bustle, the haggling and conniving as old as time,

I speak of the buildings of stone and marble, of cement, glass and steel, of the people in the lobbies and doorways, of the elevators that rise and fall like the mercury in thermometers,

of the banks and their boards of directors, of factories and their managers, of the workers and their incestuous machines,

I speak of the timeless parade of prostitution through streets long as desire and boredom,

of the coming and going of cars, mirrors of our anxieties, business, passions (why? toward what? for what?),

of the hospitals that are always full, and where we always die alone,

I speak of the half-light of certain churches and the flickering candles at the altars,

the timid voices with which the desolate talk to saints and virgins in a passionate, failing language,

I speak of dinner under a squinting light at a limping table with chipped plates,

of the innocent tribes that camp in the empty lots with their women and children, their animals and their ghosts,

of the rats in the sewers and the brave sparrows that nest in the wires, in the cornices and the martyred trees,

of the contemplative cats and their libertine novels in the light of the moon, cruel goddess of the rooftops,

of the stray dogs that are our Franciscans and *bhikkus*, the dogs that scratch up the bones of the sun,

I speak of the anchorite and the libertarian brotherhood, of the secret plot of law enforcers and of bands of thieves,

of the conspiracies of levellers and the Society of Friends of Crime, of the Suicide Club, and of Jack the Ripper,

of the Friend of the People, sharpener of the guillotine, of Caesar, Delight of Humankind,

I speak of the paralytic slum, the cracked wall, the dry fountain, the graffitied statue,

I speak of garbage heaps the size of mountains, and of melancholy sunlight filtered by the smog,

of broken glass and the desert of scrap iron, of last night's crime, and of the banquet of the immortal Trimalchio,

of the moon in the television antennas, and a butterfly on a filthy jar,

I speak of dawns like a flight of herons on the lake, and the sun of transparent wings that lands on the rock foliage of the churches, and the twittering of light on the glass stalks of the palaces,

I speak of certain afternoons in early fall, waterfalls of immaterial gold, the transformation of this world, when everything loses its body, everything is held in suspense,

and the light thinks, and each one of us feels himself thought by that reflective light, and for one long moment time dissolves, we are air once more,

I speak of the summer, of the slow night that grows on the horizon like a mountain of smoke, and bit by bit it crumbles, falling over us like a wave,

the elements are reconciled, night has stretched out, and its body is a powerful river of sudden sleep, we rock in the waves of its breathing, the hour is tangible, we can touch it like a fruit,

they have lit the lights, and the avenues burn with the brilliancy of desire, in the parks electric light breaks through the branches and falls over us like a green and phosphorescent mist that illuminates but does not wet us, the trees murmur, they tell us something,

there are streets in the half-light that are a smiling insinuation, we don't know where they lead, perhaps to the ferry for the lost islands,

I speak of the stars over the high terraces and the indecipherable sentences they write on the stone of the sky,

I speak of the sudden downpour that lashes the windowpanes and bends the trees, that lasted twenty-five minutes and now, up above, there are blue slits and streams of light, steam rises from the asphalt, the cars glisten, there are puddles where ships of reflections sail,

I speak of nomadic clouds, and of a thin music that lights a room on the fifth floor, and a murmur of laughter in the middle of the night like water that flows far-off through roots and grasses,

I speak of the longed-for encounter with that unexpected form with which the unknown is made flesh, and revealed to each of us:

eyes that are the night half-open and the day that wakes, the sea stretching out and the flame that speaks, powerful breasts: lunar tide,

lips that say *sesame*, and time opens, and the little room becomes a garden of change, air and fire entwine, earth and water mingle,

or the arrival of that moment there, on the other side that is really here, where the key locks and time ceases to flow:

the moment of *until now*, the last of the gasps, the moaning, the anguish, the soul loses its body and crashes through a hole in the floor, falling in itself, and time has run aground, and we walk through an endless corridor, panting in the sand,

is that music coming closer or receding, are those pale lights just lit or going out? space is singing, time has vanished: it is the gasp, it is the glance that slips through the blank wall, it is the wall that stays silent, the wall,

I speak of our public history, and of our secret history, yours and mine,

I speak of the forest of stone, the desert of the prophets, the ant-heap of souls, the congregation of tribes, the house of mirrors, the labyrinth of echoes,

I speak of the great murmur that comes from the depths of time, the incoherent whisper of nations uniting or splitting apart, the wheeling of multitudes and their weapons like boulders hurling down, the dull sound of bones falling into the pit of history,

I speak of the city, shepherd of the centuries, mother that gives birth to us and devours us, that creates us and forgets our existence.

Tom Mandel

Two Poems

HUNGRY AND WAITING

Everyone here has the same idea.
"My hand is of destroyed
gold. An asseverated
fountain breaks dirt
with the red flowers & herbs
that climb out of the
garden, so slowly that
they glide down the comfort
of the hill for years.
The enameled glow of time
slides through my life like dimes
through a nickel slot."
An amorous glow surrounds
them and attaches
a part of their
size to the single
temper of a radial cloud,
as latent colors pile up
in the impervious
backwater of love below.

All stars of morning singe you,
giving orders to endure.
During that meeting her war
was flashing, errant
targets, and wished flirtations.
Her war was a flashing errand.
I go crazy where we went
together. Put your Tenor
sax on the bed, clothes
on those magazines; be

funny, bounce. Take
a motel room in
the family home, man
just gallop away
with all of the salt
to make a mammoth gleam
that's shaking
in the seat of his dance
while confidential clouds stroke
my forehead.

Friendliness is not the same
as friendlessness.
A liquid and a glass
are near but not so near
as the elision of touch
is a gas. Stable
and distended, like
a marble in a mirror,
at an angle or otherwise
we float under a thin crust
of whisp, ourselves a great
unconscious borne on edge
in the unhinged plane
peeling away to radiated
paleness with painted points
crippled corners, and
ripples, a glory of wings
to perturb the motion of
purposeful bulk
into faint forward.

The edge is pulpy, but
borders of tomorrow hurtle
below cumuli of night,
until our destiny dips
under the cloudy crust
of a colorless valley
whose gray spherical interior
is clouded sky, and
movement crackles with resistance.
The sky blues to gray

through the thin menace of clustered
vapors.
Occasional clearings pierce the
monochromatic desert of grasp.
Secret clouds kindle a Valhalla
of our variance, and
only the faintest dye prevails,
dips of cloudy horizon.
A single point, and even that lapses,
is bliss to stretch
with none to touch.

Wagons pass in the gap
of authorization while
flip side attendants
loop the heavy rolls.
We round and we shot.
Meticulous with silver
the sky disappears
into a cut out enclosure.
But as I sought that haven
a streak of shangri-la sky
returned brighter than before
and on it a spot of hero's
blood was the horizon.
Credits roll up the
ravishing view. Clouds snake
under the doorman's
invading voice. A black
stripe trails downward
across the stormy quadrant
from the point of the
sun's last crust
to a touch of horizontal memory.
We turn back to black,
heart to smoke, cloud
to descending blues.

October 1986

These stars, they lock together.
They hook zero out of scale.
Their action strikes out anchor.
Their script is an anvil, tomorrow's
lights a smear on their balustrade.

Their hands are as alone,
hairs on your arm or vectors
tumbling toward the chill.

They stumble past the inside
noises. Their calculus is
adept, a package in the mail.

Their coffin is tomorrow sideways today.
Capable bubbles, zeros, they spiral
up, they storm thought's measure.

ROBERT TEJADA

A Delta for D.H.L.

1
[Pomona]

Like one who waits to witness
the aperture of "sullen earth" (whose cloister
is not without entrance)

who inhales the hyacinth (was it cyclamen?)
on this rich telluric pillow
so that a ribbon of sleep is secured

around the hair of girls in saffron petticoats
whose giggle heard from an insular cliff of Aegea
is the thrill of his falling:

those first feminine voices of memory
that unfasten him from the familiar recital
inside all closure of thought.

And the scratchy hinges of delight
when he comes into the orchard as if
entering a woman's alcove

which is only the silver dome
of the pear and pomegranate trees in the bare
winter of her governance; nonetheless

to unveil the body of its gown!
To slip into its confection
as if all else but the quince-colored tuft

which is warm at the lips, were but a bitter cake!
As if in the blur of orgasm when thumbing
her slender breasts pressed back she

looked for a moment like a boy.

2

Her song is artless. Says "mah th' maed(n) moathe innana." Says the dock's sway creak tonight: come cradle with me. Thinks of the horses at the shore whose delicate gallop might mingle with the timbre in the pellucid prose of her undoing. Might lessen the divide between all beach & motion of the sea with each Guidonian syllable in the tonic sol-fa of her choosing. Ah! to sip the hot aria of her logick like the short breaths from his mouth later buried in the muzzle of her patch. To unravel the equestrian prance of the groin and its equivocal dance-hall back-step side, side, together: whose finale sings Our Lady of the Paragraph scream *O please these drunken sailors!*

3

What with the thick immobility of our limbs & the languor
of breath surrendered like these long pulses of afternoon
from the disarrange of the still-crisp bedding we come
to find ourselves flung upon. How heavy the don is

of the sweat-speckled surface of the skin and from
whose repose came we to be tumbling from the vertigo
of the maternal rose unbending's conduit of the mind's
outward blooming & all doors swung open & all curtains

drawn. How declivity blended with spire to resemble
us walking out with Her into the abandoned boulevards
of *the silvery city of the body*, final architecture,

where the threefold cipher of maternity constructed
of Her soul's communiqué from Kali come undarken
the hard glow of this triangular light of the groin.

[S.N.]

THAD ZIOLKOWSKI

Two Poems

RULES

The distance from Q to the origin
in spare moments between exercises
each night and then regularly
whites to white beaches blacks to black beaches
impeccably clear
digit
goiter
the walls
and the garden within the walls
recede
as yes is to us so no one's are we to
nor morning nor midday nor any continuous stream
inflecting the spin of its chamber
cancellation wind perfection hypnotic tumbling
the massive sheets gerundive candelabra tissue faint
soloistic vein enmeshing the elegant
question mark's terminal stem in the cannibalistic retina
the distance from Q to the origin

INSIDE THE WIND

Inside the wind branches crossing with diagonal
etchings of rain
and inside the room a ball of yarn jerked along
knowing one day
all will be in hand, raveled in the the spillway
of a hand. Friends
too near to be touched by my lashing out
a voice says
cleave to me for I am the beloved

LAURA (RIDING) JACKSON

Introduction to a Book of Later-Life Commentaries

I initially thought of assembling these later-life commentaries on the human experience as a book of memoirs. Ruskin's "Praeterita" appealed to me initially as a leading word for its title, but as I proceeded in the writing of it, the sense of recollective treatment of one's life and work evoked by the word, and the strong implication of the category "memoirs" of terminated experience, proved unsuitable to what I had to tell. My experiences, in their essential character and content, are not framable as personal history, conveyable in the rhetoric of autobiographical narrative. I could not tell what there is further to report by going back to speak of past things in the tenses of a varied historical present. What I have now to tell requires to be told in the tenses unifying tense of survival.

The title of one of the chapters of this book is "The Person I Am." The setting of what I have to tell is a continuum without a dated story-limit. It is this not for the private particular reason that I view my life, in its eighty-seventh year as I write here, as in the midst of itself, but because I have continuously lived, and continuously live, as a witnesser of what is experienceable from within human frame of being. The person I am, the person I have not other than been, knows the length and breadth of the human frame of being as a continuum, knowledge of which is limited only by the shadows of a strangeness of minds to themselves falling upon them obstructively. The susceptibility of human beings to discomforts of strangeness to themselves has varied much from person to person, and from human time to human time, and from human places to human places. Familiarity, in human beings, of their minds with themselves, is the centralizing force of their knowledge of their reality as human beings; and it is the touchstone of their familiarity with the reality to them of their human knowledge at large. I write of what I have lived, learned, found mine to tell of from a vantage of familiarity with my matter of report that, while being a familiarity with its "personal" subjects, has, for general subject, the matter of human witness in its scope as the undivided territory of humanly possessed mind.

The *indivision* of mental presence of being of which I speak here is not a mere gesture of quarrel with the "private-public" categorization that became, in this century, a standardized distinction in the psychology of poetic authorship. I am describing a way of personal being that, for me, is the natural human life-condition, not an adopted literary position. Living by this condition took me into a literary life-course. But that this should prove to be my life-course was never, for me, an identification of it as a course of life in a special world—a "literary" world. My conception of my engagement in writing intended for reception under the broad covering denomination "literature" has comprised no sense of preparing contributions to a special property-field of human interests governed by judgment-values, customs and policies of behavior and practice, relevant centrally to its internal structure, only marginally, in incidental practicality, to the mixture of interests that make up the general human world. My understanding of the natural human point of literature is at odds with the status of literature in the time into which I was born. While I became aware, as I went on, steadily, in my literary life-course, of how grotesquely much the status of literature is at odds, in this century, with the actuality (what the natural human point of it is), I have clung to the life-course in which I committed myself. I have, undeniably, a literary-world identity—a grotesque compound of irrelevant ascriptions adhering magnetically to the fact of my accepting the denomination "literature" for my writings. To clarify my having that kind of identity by describing what this denomination signifies for me is one of my purposes in my later writing, telling, endeavor. The identity comprises that of the stranger that literary-world tags of identity have made of me in the human records of our time.

2.

My sense of what constitutes, in human substance, the literary world, this complex of interest in "writing" and "writers," and special objectives, codes of organization and personal social practice, has always been subject to the conglomerate of human living, doing, thinking, seeking to determine the further and further of what it is to be "human"—what it is, in the full of knowing being, to be. I have not seen myself as writing in an environment of literary professionalism, or as occupying an enclave of private ground within it, defying reigning standards of the literary "good." I have not brought my horizons of sensibility under any categorically literary laws of perspective or sub-literary prescriptions of personalistic autonomy. It has been part of my faith in the human power

of "writing" to distinguish between a literary professionalism that is of amateur quality in its commitment to intellectual and spiritual seriousness and a preoccupation with literature as a ground of intellectual and spiritual functioning of primary importance for the human world at large—and the world of the universe.

Despite a grim insufficiency to itself, the contemporary special world of which literature is the component fabric maintains itself in a condition of gross exclusiveness. Each of its regions boasts its peculiar mentality. All are sharply differentiated from one another by a fierce endemic inward-turned vanity, each rather contemptuous of outer views of it, all kindred in a rather contemptuous disposition towards the general outer human totality, this with condescending gratitude to it for its existence as "material." The regions are variedly many: authorial, critical, journalistic, editorial, commercial (the publisher and agency areas), scholastic, metascholastic (the region of literary activity of varying kinds and degrees of academic affiliation), cultural, metacultural. These last two are not regions so much as units of extraneous population of the literary world, that of the plain-reader sort, a visiting, non-resident slave population, and that of the proud-reader sort, a hanger-on, tourist-lover, near-resident, very "literary." Of course, many of the inhabitants of the literary world may be ranked as metaculturally "literary," in their belonging to an internal readership. Among these, there is bound to be much askance-looking at the productive output of their world. The carpers, of the metaculturally "literary," are, actually, meta-metaculturally "literary!" They tend to behave as unconscientious objectors to what they see as demeaning the dignities of literary performance—to avoid severities of judgement that might reverberate in the "other" world to the general discredit of the literary world.

To find one's way through the intricate network of interconnections of the literary world, to a point of comfortable location in it, is to be both lost in it, and to the potential human and universal reality of literature. To try to function in it on principles of human sensibility, moral, intellectual and spiritual dispositions bred up in one by one's nativity as a being of the general human world, holding to these in one's breast as one's birthright of natural resources of understanding, and to refuse to subdue or replace them with superimpositions of substitutions better suited to the literary world's requirements of competitive energy—exertion and its conventions of equating these with amenities of literary-world sociality, is to provoke literary-world assassination.

I first felt the *difference* of literary-world life in my rather brief association with the group of poets of the name "The Fugitives," first as an honorary, then as a full, member of the group; and, then, in a short period of experience of a certain section of New York City literary life. Although I reacted light-heartedly, in the main, to the New York City experience, my early-life American experience of literary-world personal and professional codes was such that if I had not been protected by a natural plain-world mental and constitutional buoyancy I might have been destroyed by it, in one or another way.

In my extensive special experience of the English literary and European-located areas of the literary world, I functioned from the beginning with a natural-world accent. By my associated, and especially so in the case of my main associate in the period of my writer's life and activity abroad from the U.S.A., were quite thoroughly impregnated with literary-world conceptions of the determining necessities and principles of the writing functions. The inspiration these had from me, the guidance, the unfolding of new or refreshed objectives, the provision of new paths of thought, the lessoning in my knowledge of word-meaning values developed from natural linguistic sensitivity, not by deduction from literary usage, the active, practical help I gave them in their work—all this was, of course, personally invigorating to them. Each took, of these ministrations, to the limit at which the sense of advantage remained uncontaminated by compunctions of vanity—vanity putting the question "Am I becoming too much indebted?" My main associate, Robert Graves, suffered of no such compunctions.

Robert Graves was congenitally literary-world minded. As a literary man, he began upon stances of literarily sophisticated simplicity. At the time of our encounter, he had exhausted that vein, and was floundering in a confusion of speculative probings of modernly new veins to which he might adapt his talents. These he had previously exercised in manipulating with personal modern twists the resources of traditional English minor-key poetic sentiment, wit, sprightly simplicity, quick, elegant turning of phrase, proficiencies in verbal conceits of brisk composition, stylishly "manly" texture. With access to my mode of being a poet, and a writer, my writing objectives not brought to definition by the donning of one or another style of literary professionalism, he entered upon a course of envisagement of an enlarged range of capability ascending to the imperial heaven of literary honors.

From the beginning of the association that developed between Robert Graves and myself there was a basic difference between the

conception each had of its nature. I did not become fully conscious of the breadth of the difference until after the termination of the association. I knew myself, in it, as one who possessed endowments and equipment that he regarded as, in their totality, an extremely valuable possession, and knew him as one longing intensely to have the like. I was not jealous of the possession. I did not regard it as something to be handled stingily. The endowment, the equipment, I viewed as anybody's natural possession for the wanting to find them in himself, herself. My part in the association I understood, therefore, as that of helping him to discover such a possession in himself. If I had worn a literary-world thinking-cap, I would have understood that the desired provisions were seen by him as mine, not as something to be discovered in himself. The fact that appreciation of them from a vantage of professional perceptivity was obscured for me in my reading of his intense preoccupation with the powers and graces he found in my writer's work, and mind, as arising from a serious moral concern about his literary performances. His concern about his attachment to my thought and my writings was essentially one of ambitious professional acquisitiveness.

The interest here of what I have been narrating is, by my intention, how literature, a pursuit of an intellectual order, and of respected social, and revered spiritual, status in the general world, has become gathered-up into a separate entity, of separate placement; how it has been made a world of its own, animated exclusively by ingrowing professional considerations, with only tenuous expediential life-line connections with the life of the general world. The product of the operations of the literary world is given forth to the cultural consumption-sites of the general world, feeding that world and feeding upon it by laws of a traditionally recognized mutuality. But the sense of mutuality has degenerated into a sense of accidental impingement of the two worlds on each other, pragmatically necessary. There is no reflection in it of a mutually recognized general human need of living according to an articulate consciousness of the human state, by an understanding concentrated, for the uses of knowledge and the ends of truth, in a living testimony of *words*, with perception of the responsibilities of this state, and solemn acceptance of them.

I see the fault of what I have been describing as being with both worlds. But I view the literary world as bearing the main onus of culpability, even in its being a self-constituted separate world and, thus, an organized—though loosely so—power. But *where* is its placement? It is not a fantasy placement: it has actual place! Where?

I think its placement is a usurpation of ground of the general world that is the destinedly free ground of natural human occupancy for the employment of language in dedicated putting of the understanding-processes peculiar to the human state into words that honor the entire reality of which the human state is the corroborating witness-within.

I have touched on some key points in my own experience of the life and substance of the literary world to illustrate the tremendous problem of placement with which the natural writer-consciousness is confronted, in the predicament of choice between the general world, now come into rampant social and spiritual disorder—so that the writers of works of serious general human relevance have no longer assurance of the older locations of general human expectedness and respectedness—and the alternative choice of the boundary-hardened literary world. In the special literary world, writers of natural-writer identity are exposed to various dangers of unacceptance or suspicious or hostile treatment, if they do not accommodate themselves to codes of autonomous literary-world legislation, and rituals of literary world self-worship.

In my activities of personal association with writers, in my life abroad from the United States, I was from my own point of view as one acting on a basis of common human concern for the good of what was done in expression-forms of language of universalized reference-scope. My devotion to the cause of the work of others was, for me, of the mould of human, not of categorically literary, fellowship. Likewise, in the project *Epilogue* of my editorship (its successive 1935, 1936, 1937, volumes), a labor of general criticism, conducted by me with desire to delineate what I in later years described as "the universal ground of criticism," I endeavored to preserve the identity of literature as of the special work-realm of human linguistic responsibilities. But I also aimed at dissolving the artificial barriers by which it separated itself from the general human destiny, barriers that constituted literature a world of special professional powers and privileges, its functions relevant to, defined and ruled by, values of "criticism" deduced from literature as a body of material collectively self-referent, both subject of judgement *and* its own source of authority.

My personal and my writing experiences in my efforts to find a course that would produce an acclimatization to each other of the world that was an outerworld to literature's congealed professional apartness and a humanized literature, self-re-educated into a freely existing inner actuality of natural writer-dedications, eventually took me to an important stage of self-knowledge. Literature, I found

I had learned, had lost its hold upon its human soul. It had become a realm of writer-opportunism, using the name, the historical setting, the social and spiritual honor, of literature as credentials of contemporary dignity of status. And I found I had learned, as to myself, that I had too easily united, as if they were easily unitable, good hope of what might be done in the name of literature and kindness to literary ambitions of zealous countenance. If literature is, as I believe it has in its twentieth-century condition, become, a *selfish* area of human performance, its denizens cannot but find it professionally disadvantageous to be other than selfish, un-innocent, practitioners in it. What I did for others in that time could have worked, I believe, towards something in each case contributory to the general world's hope of the good, and to literature's dignity, at the least. Instead, it was absorbed into the uses of individual self-centered professionally literary purpose.

3.

The arrangement of the parts of this book does not imply an orderly succession of subjects, or, yet a disorderly one. Attention is paid by me, under the provocations of certain assaults made on me in immediate and preceding literary-world decades of the century, to things of myself of my times past, and of my later times, according to my sense of myself as the responsible agent of myself of all my times. I have had to limit my attention to the hostile and the defamatory according to my sense of my responsibilities to the cause of literature as the field of honor of the human mind. The case is not that, having come to feel and to know the teeth and claws of enmity, or sheer despite, I have grown some of my own, to prove my own abilities to do hurt. I want only to raise understanding of my labors of literature above the confusions that have been cast upon the fact of myself. I believe that I have part in a propitious change-making among us all, and that the more this is understood, the better will my part be done, and the better others know their parts.

For quite long, after I had become aware of wrong-telling and wrong-doing mounted up in my life's and thought's and work's regard, I felt that adequate correction could be, in good conscience, left to a collection of my writings and papers and letters, some of this not immediately available but all to be eventually available, that was being progressively built up in a university library with my assistance. It seemed reasonable to hope that if, putting my main responsibilities in the foreground of duty, I was left without time for personal attention to material of record that mistold or mis-pictured things pertaining to me, whether from ill-feeling or some other

cause, what this collection contained would make up for failure of mine to set wrong record right. However, in very recent years, the wrong that has become injected into personal reports of me, and got lodged in ideas of the nature of my work, has spread itself about in currents of malign force; and these converge upon my field of awareness. This convergence has been like a message from the world-at-large to me; there is need of some outright testimony of my own.

Since my husband died, in July, 1968, I have had added, to the call from without to make correction of misreport, the call to elucidate what has survived the interruption of the task of exploring the nature of language as the adequate apparatus of truth in which he had joined me. This asks for a banishment to the land of Nought of the things of false report of me, which he and I put out of mind from need of a new life-immediacy. In the new immediacy I began to know, I found immunity from history's hypnotic power to return one to what one was when one was but a part-told tale of oneself—a power by which it can seize one, until the part has become the whole tale. There is, for me, now, by this immediacy, a kindness towards history: let it ring its changes on the partly-told!—as Territory of Numbers that leads up to the borders of the Indivisible, where one passes into the region of the whole tale of oneself, and all else, the land of the total eventuality, beyond change. The banishment of the things of false report to the land of Nought is a natural expression of a happiness that begins to be known on the soil of the Indivisible: let everything have its justice! says this happiness—and, in the book of complete justice, the things of false report fare no worse and no better than to be credited with their nothingness.

I am moved to give assurance, here, that I am not unaware of how "writers"—those who present writing publicly for reading by others—expose themselves personally to public viewing, public interest. I am aware that there "comes through" to the reading public, and its critical overseers, impressions of personality, character, trends of interest and purpose, that seem to supplement the public record as with an automatically present portraiture of interior fact. I mean no interference with the operations of general, ordinary human and special critical curiosity about the writers of works of writing belonging variously to literature, as such operations chance to involve treatment of the subject of myself. But I have two points of remark to set down here as to the question of a presumable hiddenness of authors from their readers and the temptations to which these are subject to fill in the mystery with conjecture.

What I am "like" personally and what my writing is "like" are both distorted from the actual case when treated as separate actualities. The idea of the hidden author, the work providing no more than clues to the obscured "real" person, is a premise that has dominated the investigative procedures of conventional biography, the interpretative deductions of literary criticism, and latterly, the psychoanalytical probing of the presumedly hidden in exposed behavior and the presumedly discoverable in hidden behavior. As a subject of treatment by these various methods of illumination, I have proved an annoyingly irreducible authorial mystery. The split between "real" person and person acting as author does not work; and the commentators tend to take their revenge in ill-tempered indiscrimination between person and author as an example of a confused unity of person and author identities both in a state of confusion. That is, I have not infrequently excited both personal and literary animus by the fact of my having simply, in my personal and authorial functioning, one order of identity. I aim, in all my functioning, at entire presence in every field of behavior and utterance in which I find myself: I do not slant myself into different approaches to personal and to authorial functioning, or to particular fields of each differentiated as necessitating varying modifications of presence.

My husband called this presence immediateness of mine my looking at everything, everyone, with "a straight look." I had occasion recently to mention this to a friend-by-correspondence in his first visit to me: he applied the figure to my functioning in utterance, characterizing it as speaking straight—speaking with a straight stance of address. To be a special case of simplicity where the rule of expectation slants minds towards sense of the literarily identifiable person as a mixture of the literarily patent and the personally arcane provokes impatience, and the suspicion that the apparent simplicity conceals more than the normally expectable confusion of the discernible and hidden, in the authorial presence. I believe that the effect of my being, as a writer, such a special case has influenced many against taking the effect to have actual depth—towards treating me, at best, as person and author, as a biographically, critically, psychologically, tiresome subject.

My second point of remark as to the question of reader-uncertainty over how much the person who is the author is humanly knowable has to do with the response with which my writing has met where it could be conceived, theoretically at least, to have, potentially, at least, a public. There has been little response to my writing, to my work taken all-inclusively, the later with the earlier,

that has not been—even where, kindly, "favorable," moved by serious interest, activated with sense of its serious imports—in the whole *evasive* of it. Those of humane response have been afraid of direct encounter with its imports. Since all evasion has some element of dishonorableness in it, the more honorable—the well-disposed—and the predominantly or entirely dishonorable forms of it evinced towards my work and the subject of myself (the latter mainly by professional seekers after easy targets on which to exercise scorn in bids for public admiration) have tended to blur into each other. This has made avoidance of facing the kind of call to attention my work makes, and of sending the mind in the direction in which it points, and itself goes, seem generally natural and critically legitimate.

Among those who have manifested good grace towards my work and myself, a course in the direction of despite, defection from good grace, can spring up somewhere along their way as, from the beginning, commitment to devoted regard has to carry some undefined escape-clause. I have found very few ready to make their own the chances that I and my work make ours—that I adopt in my work for my work—of arriving where there may issue words that open out unignorable knowables. Since what I have presented and present in my work is not itself protected with reservations, and requires a fullness of presence to it for full delivery of itself, the qualified devoted regard for it will have in it some seeds of disaffection.

4.

Perhaps the description I provide here preliminarily of literary-world behavior towards my work and myself will illuminate the connection in it between outright despite and benign attitudes. Some of the "good" behavior has tended to fall back, and to turn vaguely or distinctly "bad." I attribute this peculiarity to an ultimate measure of things in the literary-world. The terrain of literary criticism gives refuge to a race of intelligences desiring to deal at second or third hand adroitly with reality, properly dealt with at first-hand in literature. My work does not present reality in literary wrappings, and therefore does not lend itself readily to the uses of literary criticism—as understood by that race. Where some of these have simplified the problem of treating my work and myself by using an oblique approach, making charges known to be sure bases of dislike or dismissal for the impressionable, who can be presumed to be substantially represented in any audience, others, adding some conscience and generosity to the oblique approach, have

dealt nearly well with their subject. But it is these others who perpetuate the good name of literary criticism as, paradoxically, a function of necessarily differing opinion.

There is a mixture of persons of vague identity in the sense of being not classifiably of this or that race of professionalized temperament and behavior. Why should there not be, among these, some of that drifting element of the general human population who, by reason of innocent inclination to unpredetermined choices and judgements, are of that no-particular race of people called "people of good-will" (usually, with condescension by those who regard the classification as outside the ratings that operate formally and practically as organizing forces in human society)? I believe I have friends actual and potential among these, to my work and myself. Some of the presumable actual are quite unknown to me. Of the known of the actual, some, surely, have difficulty in determining how much of good-will to manifest. I take comfort from consciousness of bonds of good-will, potential and actual, existing between others and myself (myself and my work as in unity). Do I myself not belong to that race of the nondescript that earns the vague description of good-willedness from the more specialized categories of human character? At any rate, I could no more assume that the general trend of human disposition is fundamentally antipathetic in my regard than I could view myself as of other than sympathetic connection with the human generality, by the utterly unspecialized will to good-feeling towards others that I know in me.

The types of dealing with my work, and myself relatedly, are more diverse than this depiction of them reports. But the depiction has a general correspondence with the actualities. Altogether, in more truly general terms than those posed by my distinction between the literary world and the world at large of human life and performance, there is applicable to all human circumstances the distinction between a world in which off-center central values, indirect movement and response, rule, a world of less than entirely substantial substantiality, and a world in which the life lived is neither that of variously slanting ordinary disposition to human reality nor that of solitary undeviation from solitariness in a life "unworldly." Life lived in this other world is ruled by knowledge of the difference between the straight in movement and response, and all else. The purpose, here, is to live *not* divided between two worlds. One tries for the fortune of straight encounters of consociation in common purpose. And can go far afield from hope's invisible likelihoods, thinking to find them in the throng of the unlikely. Thus, there is no avoiding being in places that prove to be wrong

places, or avoiding being unrightly dealt with. These are two aspects of one's bounden apprenticeship to time, from which one learns the length of mishappening: how long it may be till the mishappened loses its reality as, in truth, what life "is."

The distinction I make between the general human world, understood as encompassing human life in the large, and a special literary world, viewed as representing to the other world its consciousness of itself, reflects the literary world's offering articulate forms of the human consciousness to the general world, to compensate for deficiencies attributed to it as a predominantly inarticulate, unconscious, consciousness. In other words, I see the practice of literature as having eventually culminated in a politics of pre-emptive conversion of the practice into a field of competitive power-exercise in which the literature-fostering and literature-fostered voice of human consciousness of life as a universally comprehensive state of being is displaced by a mechanism of many-voiced and many-purposed literature-production. Each "voice"—each individual authorial consciousness speaking (writing) as a "creative" version of the general human consciousness—sustains the potency of the mechanism as a world apart from the world of ordinary human speaking-writing procedure, and is sustained in its bid for individual potency by the separate-world character of the mechanism.

The connection between the two worlds is demeaning in its effect on the general world: literature is dispensed to the general world by the other as a lore of human consciousness beyond the reach of ordinary human acquisition. The connection is also demeaning in its effect on the various elements of the mechanism that have compounded themselves into a literary "world." The "writers," in their diverse ranks, the framers, and other indispensable participants in the operation of the mechanism as a world-like unit—all take their identity from the status of the literature-production operation as a superstructure elevating the ordinary structure of human consciousness of life and identity by its elevation of itself above it. Everyone involved in the maintenance of this culturally politic religiosity of special service from above to the general, ordinary, in human consciousness is tainted with the pretensions of the scene of literary production to the status of extra-territorial extraordinariness.

The traditional standards of literary virtue, linguistic and rhetorical decorum and thematic discretion and dignity, have been overwhelmed in the flood of democratic revolution against autocratic limitation. What government there was in literature in its traditional

course was moral, internal. It is democratized literature that has become the external loosely hierarchical entity describable as "the literary world." It provides opportunities for individual free power-exercise that allow literary virtue to performances that are of specious literary character in being inventive exaggerations of individual consciousness-experience, not explorations in the field of discovery that literature, little by historical little, mapped, anticipating the ultimate single vision, the completely articulate, humanly whole, consciousness.

Literary performance is no longer enacted on the general ground of the human world, the place of human life at large. There has been fashioned for it, by a consortium of interests assuming practical management of the concerns of literature and enfolding an ever-increasing number of aspirants to the status and identity "writer," an enactment place of its own. Here, all performance is at the remove of theatric art from speaking-writing report of life on the common human plane of consciousness-experience. Writers of literature no longer belong to a tradition of literature. They belong to a system of charge-taking of the function of literature that converts its content into commodities of the nature of works of art. They minister to appetites of the emotions and imagination, from distances of mind dividing the ground of human consciousness into two privacies, a vast one overhung by a general humanly unarticulated fear of an eternal meaninglessness, the other of a compact, concentratedly verbal domain brimming with individually inventive formulations of meaning designed to demonstrate that something or other, somebody or other, a busy little world, indeed, of supra-ordinary preoccupation with the meanings of human experience, can be counted on to take on the responsibility of demonstrating that *some* sense can be variously written, and read, into it.

Anyone who "writes" now, either strives to attain a fixed position in the world of literary activity, or, having attained it, to improve in dignity and honor in the occupation of it, or is, against all disinclination, entangled in the processes of functioning as a writer that now automatically induct writers into dues-paying membership in the world of literary society. Whether the dues are paid under circumstantial compulsion or in a spirit of self-satisfaction, belonging to the literary world of twentieth-century creation offends against—to my understanding—the historic moral grace of literature and the natural spiritual intelligence of the human consciousness of general human possession of it. The setting for literary activity in which I found myself enwrapped in the period of time in which my life as a writer has fallen has been for me one of

intractable difficulty, I being as a writer faithful to literature as belonging to the general human truth-hope—not subject to the constraints imposed by a mechanism of literature-production of the power scope of a world-in-itself. Whatever the extent to which I may have overcome this difficulty is to be credited, I believe, to my having begun my life and work as a writer with no least awareness that writers and writing had location in my time in a special world set off from the human world-at-large by its fiat of proprietary superintendence of all literary performance, and, to my having never come to regard myself as operating under this custody. Refusal to exchange my human innocence for a sophistication of twentieth-century literary worldliness enabled me to maintain my principles of human judgement and my principles of literary judgement in unsplit identity.

5.

When I say to those who interest themselves in my life's course as a "writer" that an important key to the tracing of the line of development in the history of my work is a sense of myself as one who has been ever in "movement," my meaning is not that I have continuously changed the direction and objectives of my writer-activity. The movement has been, is, an increasing abiding by, an unchanging following of, the behest of my human consciousness that there is something to bring into clarity of knowledge, utterance, and livable reality, that, left unclearly known, expressed, lived, leaves the human form of being—this spaciously intelligent kind of being—a self extinguishing, as if accidentally miraculous, explosion of life in the universe.

Starting with my individual inheritance of that energy of motivation of the force of a behest which is integral with our intelligence, I have not been distracted by the appeal of the short-cuts to fullness of knowledge, expression, life-experience, that make up in ponderous part our history-transmuted cultural inheritance. I have not rested at any categorically literary solution of the problem of human intelligence of meeting its call upon myself, its nature as consciousness of a degree transcending time and space. I have not tried to make the cultural authority of literature the necessary host of a realized unity of literary and general human values—values of the good to serve for all orders of human judgement. The literary area of writer-habitation was not conceived of by me as an enclosure to the local and temporal constrictions of which writer-activity must accommodate itself, by conformity or protesting disconformity upon the ground of the resisted constrictions. While I have paid a

ceremonial respect to the reasonable existence of a literary area of writer-activity as a common ground of special spiritual purposefulness in the use of words, the actual area in time-length and spatial extent that has marked itself off as professionally literary ground in the years of my functioning as a writer was not spiritual domicile enough for me to induce me to look to it to embrace in the cultural shelter of its hospitality what was culturally incongruous with it in my work's time-spirit and the dimensions of my offerings: I have sought no peace of professional convenience with the twentieth-century literary world course-of-events. But neither have I labored to impress myself upon it as a dissident. The sense I have tried to speak as a writer is not for me in cultural debate with any of the cultural trends that have served as the handwriting of twentieth-century literary history. I know the sense those trends offer as, variously, stopping-places beyond each one of which there is nothing but trial of an alternative stopping-place. I have, I say, been ever in movement. But where—if not in counter-movement to these trends?

My movement has been formally literary: I have adhered to the canons of linguistic grace that are part of traditional literary principle. I have made no compromises between observance of them and accommodation of my writer practice to any of the breaks with literary tradition that have wrenched literary practice from its cultural security as an intellectually independent function and converted it into a form of linguistic politics, of anomalous identity. I have followed a line of expectation from myself of something and something of linguistic distinctiveness to say, eloquent of the capacity of my mind to take into consciousness the more and more pressing upon it for human acquaintance. I mean "human," not "individual" acquaintance. My posture of concern with writing has not been that of the vague moral individualism of twentieth-century standards of personal honesty, or that of the vague intellectualism of twentieth-century standards of literary integrity.

The literary aspect of my posture of presence to the circumstance of conscious presence to and in a world-entirety of being has been, simply, the character of my presence as a travelling presence, a moving by the gift of my human intelligence towards a closer and closer interiority of presence in this world. The literary aspect of this presence has not been other, for me, than the thinking-speaking actuality of human consciousness in the concentrated manifestation of it that acquired cultural recognition as *literature*. But its essence for me has inhered in this demonstrable attainability of human consciousness to thinking-speaking intensities of living presence in a

universal reality—inhered not in the concrete verbal substance of literature, but in the spirit of the human will to asseverative honesty of being to which literary thinking-speaking occasions have served as forms of respect-paying. I have not bestowed upon the literary occasions, the forms of respect-paying to this truth-spirit, a significance of fulfillment of it, only the significance of occasions made for the declaring of its presence in our presence. I have known literature as reflecting the movement of the spirit in the human will: such are the conditions of what identity-relation exists between my writer-will and the historical fact of literature.

It would be a mistake to interpret the kind of relationship I describe myself as having, as a writer, to the historical fact of literature as my adopting a wholly subjectivist position towards it, what I name "interiority" taken to be operating as a writer from a personal ground apart, literature to me a realm of abstraction. I am not in personal nature, was not as a child or in the subsequent life-age times given to self-withdrawal from life-experience into self-experience. What went on around and around me, near and less and less near, was what occupied my consciousness, substantially, not what went on "in" myself. I have been internally, always, very lively-spirited towards others, and towards environing courses of circumstances, not making any particular limited area of association a fixed orientation-point from which to live generally as a human being. I have felt and thought, in all my presence in courses of circumstance and contacts of human relationship, in an unvarying state of freedom—this as the given state of my being, the only state of myself I know as myself.

6.

Particular characterization of the work of particular authors has hardened, in the literary times of our century, into terminological banalities comparable to the commonplaces of everyday characterizations of individual persons according to their being like this or that behavioral standard of person-kind, or its opposite. From my earliest years of understanding, I withdrew myself from such standardization—as to whether, for instance, I inclined to playing with other children or not, friendship making with others of my age, or not. It may be that the indifference I manifested to judgments of what I was, or was not "like" produced in my home-quarter a peaceable resignation to my resolve to be like nothing but myself. Until I was away at college, I inhabited a three-cornered (Mother, Father, Sister) pattern of concern that did not amount to a ready-made pattern for my early and eventual happiness into which it was hoped that I

would little by little fit myself. The pattern was more an open space marked by Mother, Father, Sister (older half-sister) than a design for a successful personality. They were, the three, very different: I was not sufficiently a unifying concern in their midst to cause the pattern to become something of a common field of influence for them or for me. At the least, there were no artificialities; the pattern imposed no demands, no definition of the kind of person I ought to try to be.

A single brief note about my father that I made in a biographical statement, reporting his devotion to the cause of Socialism, and dream of my becoming, one day, a second Rosa Luxembourg, has been here and there transmuted into biographical data as to myself, I learned much from my father's hearty and literate political sympathies, as, also, from his broad cultural sympathies, as, also, from my older sister's active interest in the arts. And from my Mother's down-right, simple-eyed preoccupation with what was in immediate view, all expectation suspended between uncertain hope and uncertain hopelessness, I learned much about the routines of patience. But the central experience that my life as a member of my family provides was the knowledge that my instinctive appreciation of the state of my being as a state of freedom had a reality of extension in my parental home-ground. I was free to be what I was, on that ground, not by pattern or plan but as by fiat of birth as a human being. I regard this elementary natural blessing on my existence as no accident of parental temperament. My relations with my parents, as the status of independent personhood succeeded that of "child" more and more tangibly, never comprised argument as to this. There was never, in my family home-life, quarrel as to the fact of me, though at times, my mother and I could be querulous with each other, and, at times, my father and I could sharply disagree. My father and I knew each other to be non-temporizers, and loved each other as such. Once, we disagreed about something—I long ago forgot about what—to a point of matching intransigence. It was arranged that I stay with a friend of the family until the pains of the disagreement had passed—as they did before long (but for as long as a few weeks, as I remember). I was then in my early high-school years. Thereafter we never parted dramatically over a disagreement. He died not long before my return to America after living abroad for many years. By then we had both moved on, on, in our freedom-governed life-lines, confidently content, each, with the fact of the other, all uncompromised, ahead.

That literature came to appear to me a scene of activity occupiable in full freedom of spirit, hospitable to the natural will in one to realize articulately the specifics of the peculiar honesty of

being constituting the human counterpart to physical individuality, I do not regard—could not regard—as a naïveté of self-indulgent idealism. Literature—the fact of it, among the earliest of facts one learns in the process of acquainting oneself, and being helped to acquaint oneself, with what people do, and what people have done —is an extension of the spontaneous act of human intelligence of *speaking*. Speaking is the most concentratedly human act; and literature grows out of speaking by effort to make something of the spoken that will last, not be lost in the flow of the natural spontaneities of speech, the occasions of this ever succeeding each other. Literature can excite, very early in conscious contact with the fact of it, a recognition in the speaking proclivities, the verbal sensibilities of the mind, of a potentiality of combining the immediate and the permanent inflections of meaning containable in speaking occasions.

The human speaking instinct is not towards utterance tailored to the limit of the passing occasion; its animating force is towards completeness of utterance. The fact of literature answers to the insistence of human minds on the harmonizing of the particular and the general, the temporary and the constant, in the story of human knowledge they are moved to bring to delivery. This correspondence between the fact of literature and the constitution of human beings as speaking beings accounts for all the natural attraction of literature in its traditional continuousness as filling what would otherwise be a void in human language-experience and for what health there has been in writer or reader participation in its perpetuation.

The total fact of literature embraces many vagaries of writer-purpose and reader-interest (catered to perversely). But literature has ministered to the human sense of need of linguistic fullness, represented the ideal reality of whole statement, of entire narrative, perfect description, true explanation—of the all-revealed, the all-imparted. It is an external witness to the internal unacceptance of the human mind of left-unspoken elements of human consciousness. It has performed as such a ritual of promise by human beings to themselves (human nature to itself) to fulfill *somehow* the function they know themselves to embody of speaking the meaning-content of being—being as the infinite potentiality of being—in the language of universalized consciousness of being concentrated in the mind-frame of themselves.

Whatever corruptions of the intrinsic intent of the human form of being literature has taken under its sky, as a facsimile world of human intent, producer of kinds of truth making human nature

answerable only to itself, the living outline of literature as a token—be it but, now, a time-saved, time-battered, mutilated, token—of expression of being answering to the identity "human," at language's I-speaking center of infinite potentiality of self-verifying being, haunts all living human existence, reminding of its unspoken part, the humanly unlived. I myself had early sense of the universalizing shape of literature behind the cosmorama of history's museum of written exhibition of the ideal of the fully-spoken. I was not bewitched into contentment in the *materia historica* of literature as index of the literarily sufficient, or into excitement of enjoyment of private literary linguistic adventure (for private reading enjoyments) such as propelled the "new" twentieth-century writer-mood along its emptily independent, directionless course.

I began, as writer, from the feel of movement in the fact of language, and the reverberating insistence of this in the fact of literature. With unbroken feel of a necessity not privately mine, I kept moving towards where the arrows of literature's promise (the infinite insistencies of the universal internalized in the finite expressness of the human) have pointed from literature's antiquity. I have had this freedom not by the favor of the literary patronage of my time in any of its incoherently indulgent forms, but by the support my soul has given my mind. The soul is antique—as the mind is immediate. I have believed in the originating truth-preoccupied inspiration of literature. This has armored me against succumbing to the potency of "literary" influences. I mean, the deceptive appearance of identity with the linguistic ideal at the moral heart of the existence of literature that the customs of engagement in literary activity can take on as standards of achievement, where the activity is pursued under a cultural, socially and intellectually, assigned, legitimacy.

To picture both simply and vividly my instinctive adherence as a person to a rule of freedom of personal nature from a governing consciousness of need of being "like" one or another designated kind of personal natures, and, as a writer, to a rule of freedom of writer-nature from a governing consciousness of need of practicing a style of writing identifiable from within a special literary vocabulary of likenings of writing to this or that kind of practice, I bring into bearing here a true little tale about myself that my mother told me, writing to me late in her life. The tale (never before told me) was that in my earliest days the very first year-or-so, I had been, in presence, "a joy." I can clearly recall, indeed, a photograph of myself as still of baby-age that shows a brimmingly joyful little being. It spelt to me, and recollection of it stills spells, a little being accepting

the fact of herself to the full of enjoying precisely being this, precisely. My feelings towards the writer-identity that I found to be mine have for me a kindred precision. I gave it full acceptance as confirming my possession of human nature and the inseparable fact of possession of a mind by which to know the meaning of being, precisely, human, and to enjoy, to my mind's powers of knowing meaning, access to the meaning mind-possessed by being in its entire nature. To be all and only oneself signalizes the human. The human signalizes the entire. The succession signalizes the love of completion: such is the tale literature tells as it is a joyfully precise wording of all that is to tell, not a clumsily endless succession of variations merging in storied monotony.

7.

From the beginning of literature's existence, its distinguishability as representing the working of a linguistic ideal in human intelligence, it was destined to suffer a double identity. Ostensibly, under the auspices of historical esteem, it is comprised of modes of linguistic practice suiting ideas of dignity and care proper to utterance offered as eloquent of the human spirit of understanding. But literature, in its fixed character as possessing important spiritual significance and status, acquired a secondary identity as an ever-changing scene of individual strivings, in the activity-forms of literature, for successful achievements—literary compositions that had immediate bearings of social utility. Literature, as prey to compulsions of cultural expedience, becomes a field of contest for credit of powers of spiritual spokesmanship; and the implications of double potency attached to the double identity—of spiritual force and culturally influential social force—have built themselves into the treatment of the fact of literature. In the attitude to literature that had come to be dominant in literate consciousness of the fact of it, by the time of the twentieth-century's manifesting itself as a new century, the two identities, and the two potencies—that in the residual spiritual legacy of tradition and that in the residual social legacy of cultural change—had merged. There was no longer a foundation-principle of identity in general human consciousness of the fact of literature. The double identity had swallowed up the fact; and the obfuscation of identity-sense of the fact of literature had infiltrated its dark into the identity-sense of the fact of human-natured being itself.

I picture here my understanding of the course of the eventual engulfment of the reality of literature, as performance of spiritual motivation, in the conversion of the linguistic ideal that generated

identity-sense of the fact of literature as spiritually coincident with identity-sense of the fact of human-natured being into preoccupation with private aims of self elevation above socially commonplace identity-norms, by culturally admirable feats of verbal skill. The picturing may seem too complex for the simply identified result—or too simple for the result seen as but one aspect of a complex fact of an ever-expanding diversification of human competitive activity. However this be, there is no doubting that the fact of literature was put through a death by its being over-run by an expansion of activities of self-emphasis that loosened the framework of linguistic and other human proprieties, in the new century's appearance of being a time for continuous innovation and self-revising of identities. The speaking habit became more and more embroiled in new-century activities of self-experiment. The historically mapped general human orientations of the speaking habit, imperfectly reliable in their rough balancedness between the needs of immediate and eternal sense but practically indispensable, became lost in infatuations of mind with the numerically unlimited, essentially identity-less fact of the newly self-created self. A flood of linguistic individualism poured out incontinently from breach on breach in the old walls of honesty-guarding human discretion. The effect has been an over-running of literary activity with literary activity. A world of literary traffic—it came about finally in the century's course—silenced the antique throb of the will-to-truth in the all-submerged fact of literature.

That literary activity came to have the force of a negation of literature's function of fidelity to the humanly ascertainable meaning of being is explicable in some part by the collapse of the idea of the human being as ideally represented by a male figure of perfectly generalized human identity. I have written on this phenomenon elsewhere. Limit my account of it here of its incidental character as a component of the development of a literature-negating process in engagement in literature to a brief consideration of its effects in the engagement, in particular, in poetry. In no other field of engagement in literature has the literature-inspiring idea of the human being as of a universalized nature, and the literature-ordaining sense of language as the instrument of transformation of the physically diffuse elements of human sensibility into the substance of thought by the mind's power of using words to order its processes, been so *smashed*—broken into pieces.

Modern trends in individualistic self-emphasis culminated in a pseudo-modern emphasis in the consciousness of male human beings of their maleness, which acquired the force of a stamp of

personal identity. This new intensified stress in the minds of men on sexuality as an element of personal identity has exhibited itself extensively, in the practice of poetry by men, in a nullification of the generalized human identity bestowed by traditional literary idealism on masculinity, as metaphoric emblem of the human. The scene of poetry itself in our immediate time is an elaborate complex of diverse behavioral scenes—privately, culturally, intellectually, even actionally, personal—that assemble themselves into a gross overactive spectacle of vanities. Maleness is a stamp of identity in contemporary being-a-poet is of such a forcible prominence that the special tones of feeling it imparts to poetic speaking, the special frames of mind to poetic writing-style, have passed unidentified as what they distinctively are, in the field of critical literary sensibility. The entire field of literary sensibility (as indeed that of general intellectual sensibility) fell under the spell of modern trends on individualistic self-emphasis as merely stages in modernism's course of intellectual discovery of the "natural" in human, literary, linguistic, anthropological, etc., fact. New feministic sensibility has no response of special feminine insight to the phenomenon I have singled out for notice here. It itself fell so much under the spell of these trends that use by women of femaleness as a stamp of personal identity is automatically imitative of the male model. They have no consciousness of what they are doing in their self-emphasis as of female sexuality as other than being modernisitically individualistic.

The unitary reality of humanness and the unitary truth-effectuality of language have suffered, in the poetry-preoccupied areas of literary performance, a more radical denaturing of the underlying principles of the existence of literature than they have in any other of the categorically demarcated regions of literary activity. Poetry became, in twentieth-century use-making of literature as ground for experimenting in new-drawn philosophical and psychological patterns of human identity, a scientifically rationalizable mythology of intrinsic individuality (each human being a different human animal). Other regions of literary activity drew upon this new poetic ideology as if accomplishing thus a poetic liberalization of themselves. Every scene of literary activity became a vanity-scene, with poetry the royal court of literary performance extending its special prerogatives of literary power and distinction far into outlying literary space.

The subject of poetry has been smashed into pieces, broken up into *poets*, the number of these crowding out the idea of *poetry* except as a supervenient presence to the fact of poets. Literature in

general has become a supervenient presence to the fact of *writers*, a name for the sum of them receding into shrunken abstraction as the number of them overwhelms any collective significance surviving in the name. Numbers are the reality; our immediate literature is the reality of the din of the traffic in writing issuing from the writing of writers sounding in the world of our daily lagging human speaking as at the illusory distance of a world of speaking success, language-maturity, intelligence everywhere busily articulate.

The present world of daily human life-traffic contains, in the general marketplace of human interchange, many deceivers—many practices of deception kept in renewal by a failure of active trust of the human in the human. But there are underlying laws of social commerce, alternations in philosophic moods, currents of ideas competing for followers. There is an elementary expectancy of possibilities of benefit from experiences of association: allowance is made for such possibilities in the course that expectancy lays out, though suspicion of the adverse in possibility is never absent. But it has come about in the places of literary traffic that there is no floor of barest principle to sustain the minimum in confidence.

Believers in the name of literature as a name of good omen, whether of the reading public or the writing fellowship, must support confidence by deducing an overhead plane of principle, from which—itself hypothetical—hypothetical blessings descend upon the practice of literature. But nothing in the temper of engagement in and concern with literary activity that has come to predominate in the special world these now constitute is infused with the spirit of the Heights. The floor that that world lacks—a match in it to the laws of natural social expectancy—is a rule of obedience to the linguistically given incorruptibility of words. If you do their bidding, whatever use you make of them will have some virtue; as you do not, what use you make of them, and you yourself, will be fraught accordingly with corruptions of virtue. There may be those who try to stand on their personal floor of verbal honor, and, reaching up from this, to have direct communion with the spirit of the Heights—Heights conceived of as a property to which literature vouchsafes special rights not only of professional usufruct but real access of soul. However, there is no transcending the prevailing conditions of literary activity by mere reverential evoking of an ideal that the conditions exclude from practical bearing on the activity.

No room is provided in the world of twentieth-century literary pragmatics for freedom of endeavor to serve the ideal implicit in literature's having come into existence. To behave as a writer as one naturally possessed of such freedom is to invite immediate or

eventual rejection, in that world, as literarily, and humanly, indigestible—though the compass of the digestible, there, is continually stretched with greedy leniency to embrace palate-enticing literary fare offered as "new" (signifying "extra-good"). Question of the "new," in relation to twentieth-century literaryism, is inseparable from the question of the "old," which tantalizingly haunts the twentieth-century literary consciousness, generally, and especially in the branch of twentieth-century literary apologetics that has taken shelter under the name "poetics."

Literary world treatment of my work, poetic and other, in the century's past six decades, exhibits the incapacity of the literary consciousness of these periods for dealing with instances of the old present in their content of writing of literary form. The case of my work has been dealt with as not identifiable or evaluatable as other than an instance of the twentieth-century literary "new." Treated thus, its nature is lost from perception; for the essence of its nature is the reality it has as breathing in and out the life-spirit of the "old" of literature's existence—the hope born, in the human and language's "old," of utterance redeeming human life from its death in the repeatedly left-unsaid, untold, unlived.

The story of my dedication to literature as the ground of hope of human attainment to truth of word—prompted by love of perfection, the guiding genius of human desire—collides with the story of literature as a by-product or marginal accompaniment of human history: with the historical fact of what literature has become in the time-on-time divagations of human life. My story is not tellable as an incidental component of the historical story of literature; nor is that story tellable as the background substance of my story. But the two are joined in their differences. Without the telling of the story of literature as I tell it in the story of my dedication to literature, the human link between the fact of being and the fact of joy-taking in being as the life-reality secreted within the fact is obliterated from the necessarily all-encompassing story of being. My story has to do with the old, old, betokening of literature in the old, old, human acceptance of being as an all-discoverable and all-livable destiny.

GENE FRUMKIN

The Brown Dog

Brown dog frozen to the side
of a brick building, half a floor up.
His dead muzzle whimpers in wind
that comes from Lake Ontario or another water
nearer to us. We are children, our job
to scrape the dog off that brick
even as his head, still not stiffened
to the body, quivers lightly, nodding.
Eyes
open, we notice, darkly alight, living
in the frozen morning. We wonder, I'm sure,
how the dog climbed the several feet
of brick wall, how it happened
that the frost so meticulously
caught him mid-step. Where was he going
that night in mid-October when
nothing in the air confirmed a
deathly cold?
Almost, we thought,
as if the dog were paper. We stayed back,
not frightened but wishing for the sun
to brighten, to warm up. Who had assigned us
this task? Maybe he would rise in the breeze,
lofted by our imagination into the hole
of another mystery.
She and I waited,
children did I say? No, but frightened
of our years, their purpose in bringing us
this far, to see that brown dog, in its meaningless
mid-journey.
I take her cold hand.
My mind whimpers. Let's dig, she says, wherever
we can. I raise my shovel towards
the dog's feet, then lower it. No, I say
some other time. She nods. The sun stays,
clinging to the same wall.

ROBERT VANDERMOLEN

Three Poems

FARM HOUSE

Your muscles take a long time to grow tame again

Ah, the scent of marigolds
Kneeling in them
Crushing them

There is just the chair
Where you rock against an unfinished wall

With cornstalks and crows,
A detached illustration from a calendar

At 65 degrees

And something about leather
The color, the memory of leather
Hauling wood on your sled to the kitchen for your mother

Ah, the beauty of neglect

Hitting stones with a baseball bat
And watching them sail into the stony pasture

You were born into an age that lost things
That ran roughshod over real wood

That imagined loneliness
Was a dimness—a low-grade disease—

Not bright and cold

Ambivalence, not wildness

Not like the armies of Fall
When the apples are ripe

Under the porch
Where you tossed things all summer

They settled in

That in itself
Is a pleasure, like cider, the taste and color of cider

Like the sky heading south, and all the trucks
Rumbling dust past the barn

UP NORTH

The breeze brings a fragrance
Of youthfulness

All the animals are hiding

I would like to hide too

Such is the Windemere
Of our spirit and deeds sometimes

That overwhelming hangover
Of regret
That rides down like a giant sliver
With leaves and small twigs

There's nothing to do
But complain

(shoot complain
in the knees
and it still hobbles)

What conclusions
Do you want me to draw?

That it is self-defeating
To ignore the trees?

Myself, I prefer white pine

FROM HERE TO THERE

1.

The sun is hard
You have to keep working
Not to think about it

It takes weeks to slow down

Sitting in the shade
Driving at night with the windows down

To be like the river
Gliding through boulders
Perpetually

With the woman you want
Superior, disdainful

A glass of vodka heavily iced

The red dusty road charging
Down 3000 feet to sea level

To a town
Where tourist Californians
Cruise one street to the harbor

But you are not a movie, and there isn't a welcome
Far from the steaming docks

2.

Or you are a movie

You are play, the sense of play

Otherwise the distaste that is required
Makes no sense

In the maroon light watching the lizard
In the traces of everything
That means to order itself

The delight in refusing to learn

RON PADGETT

Wisconsin

It's hard to find that little room again,
the one you like to find yourself in
but not have to find. A certain plateau of tranquility
spreads evenly over the face of the coming night
and there is large smiling in the cracked darkness.
The puzzle holds, though, even when your little sister
tips the table over with a silent crash
against the loud floor. And now there is some
two-colored radiation from the carolers
who have upper bodies and lower stilts
that vault their voices into a renaissance
whose inside is entirely covered with a floral pattern
and cisterns placed every twenty paces along
the long hallway that leads to the little room
with its fireplace and burning logs
and terrible buildup of soot on the stone legs
of the Fireplace Giant, who seems born
for this terrible destiny, always to have
darkened legs and flaring eyebrows
that rise as if lifted by invisible threads
into the evening above his stocking cap,
a blue dome that holds in his massive idea
that thunders in the distance and wants out.

FRIEDERIKE MAYRÖCKER

Franz Schubert, Or: Notes on the Weather, Vienna

(Tr. from the German by Rosmarie Waldrop)

1st Weather:

beside the sun, actually, and thin to set on fire: lightning in wing formation, you could feel the fish leap up in the brook.

Rapturous prose, to wit, 36 postillions blowing about, everyone's lovers.

And the lovers banded together and formed societies punch bowl full to the brim.

2nd Weather:

out of the corner of my eye I could see how he borrowed a typewriter from the hotel clerk, belted it on like a vendor's tray and so squeezed into the elevator, into his room.

Trickling away; spittoons filled with lavender. The other hotel guests confirmed, the resemblance unmistakable: plump putto placid kind of body brown curls graceful curve of lips eyes melancholy *Schubert glasses* (which, it is claimed, he does not take off at night so as to note down themes right on awakening or give way to feelings which, with scrolls and flourishes in the old style, even *Dreimädchen* candy).

"Me:" Franz Schubert writes to Therese Grob, "will you ever know me?"

3rd Weather:

while forced to wait out a downpour: that W.A. Rieder painted a water color of Schubert at a slight angle, dreamy, if not without pose.

Tongues tattling; shrill noon light.

Fortune's lap child caught in lightning; he should worry because he's part of the band—the coach turns over.

4th Weather:

a *note* dressing him down, and he sighs in pitch. "That fire," Franz Schubert writes to Therese Grob, "kindled in you *by circumstance.*"

"Like trickling when the box *slowly tore open* and my books fell out on the floor while you danced and stomped your feet that the whole room shook, yea heaven, and I nearly emptied the inkwell on my draft instead of the sand."

"A pleasant opening of your eyes tomorrow morning."

5th Weather:

and reproaches himself, *groundswell.*

While some kinds of order / tones / descend, others rise; so that the extreme poles of a stormy landscape draw together, former shrill circumstances blur—a journey, on foot, to the Lobau.

Shoemaker's glass ball, a lamp, a shower.

Descriptive: white rivers in the gutter, in the puddles, reflections of lightning; fishermen, Danube boatmen, strenuous laughs from the inn; feelings that simply *tumble* over each other.

6th Weather:

"as if," Franz Schubert writes to Therese Grob, "the tongue *of my foot* were torn out, by its tongue-root;"

"as if I wore, above my left ankle, on the outside of the leg, and so I could feel it, a tattooed caduceus—"

and to brother Ferdinand: "*no sooner the baby delivered!* (Mass in B Flat) than I'm swept off again, overwhelmed, utterly, unearthly, urgent, while the last piece is only just being engraved. . ."

Tropical motif in the accompaniment, let it blow.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see how he got the telephone directory from the hotel clerk; could follow his tongue as it twisted twice, whispered: "t'one directory. . .t'one directory!" Could see him—after much leafing through—absorbed in one of the volumes.

7th Weather:

plates of landscapes and instrumentalists, *from lead cuts.*

Wads of snow outside the window.

"Woke up at five this morning," Franz Schubert writes to Therese Grob, "half frozen, on top of the bed with my clothes on."

"Too little modulation in places, and are you really letting those notes which are lying about, these childish—"

to his friend Schober: "as if they had *eyes* all over, those ladies, scattered all over their skin, six-eights. And their scant talent for conversation—the darling statues! so vague and easily convincing. . ."

8th Weather:

what a bare morning!

painterly to the painters, at heavenly length!

in the thick of it, pancakes with sugar. Antiphonal choirs in black chalk on blotting paper—the prompter's box would have the loudest word.

In the bushes, *drowned out*, singing.

"The geography of Salzburg," Franz Schubert writes to Therese Grob, "all lost (Gastein). Where we nowhere remember ever having been."

"How can I thank you for not refusing my letters on a sad subject."

9th Weather:

and to the friends in Vienna: "how I miss you. Glorious as it is here, mighty eager to be back."

"How is our Cherubino (Schwind)?"

("I know how you felt reading this.")

Against his hunter's chest, chromatic country life. Rifles clicking all around.

10th Weather:

in the quiet of morning—*got to start again somewhere.*

Schubert to Spaun: "for four hands / variations / the pianists here, little surveyors Hungarian style, little hussies—ear-splitting! blowing my head off. . ."

"out of the clear blue sky yes out of the clear blue sky! and somehow against the grain, this piece, these Bagatelles, of this emotion. And in the end an Overture as thundering as can be."

Out of the corner of my eye I could see him leaning at the bar, sleepily, wiping his glasses again and again with a deerskin cloth after having breathed on them and held them up to his eyes.

Because and why. Easy now, with one of the servant girls.

11th Weather:

of the breeze in the air, the dappled trills.

(Venereal) *Sprechgesang*: heavenly letters worn on the skin.

To Therese Grob: "You write in your letter of the 24th of February that your life is a house of cards a mere breath could blow down. This only seems so to you, many people have similar feelings, me too, for instance about my body-build. Nevertheless, your life seems to me wide with potential because

of your great modesty. You must have had very virtuous and sheltered ancestors who never got too big for their boots."

12th Weather:

Question-ability, tearful—looks for Beethoven, can't recognize his own apartment.

Exclusive light, sparks in his eyes. That stage coach.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see how *his fingers jerked upward* with the *shock* from the metal frame of the coach door, how the soft blurry outline of his body seemed to stagger toward the glass doors of the hotel.

The impression that; had lost all sense of place.

13th Weather:

panel painting, corpulent delirium, Schober throws off on clairvoyance.

"Space, as you know," Franz Schubert writes to Hüttenbrenner, "plays a large role in music."

"I've had my piano repaired again—things wrong with the swell organ too, *the more practiced hand etc.*"

"I've wondered for years how it is the seemingly small and unimportant details which make for the perfect fusing of all parts, fruitful as the undefinable earth, and more so."

14th Weather:

Change of scenery, flowery letter—*nearly makes me forget our little game.*

Fresh chicken, cream puffs, a second summer in Zeléz, rail junction, furious dancing! Got to go the whole hog and then some! whimsically ruffling his hair. What tender helpmeats, may their flanks, flakes, flaming mantles—

to Schwind: "such hounds the barons. There are hounds like this. The cook on the loose side, the maid very pretty, often

keeps me company (but that he could not enjoy it, and cried with longing instead)."

15th Weather:

to Schober: "hopeless embraces with Th. G.!"
"so I've finally come to face *that she cannot love me!* whatever the reason"—
"if my eyes don't give out, a Fantasy for Four Hands / to comfort a child."
Hot springs.

16th Weather:

but hay fever, like a long night—harmonic fundaments.
To Kupelwieser: "like an image you cannot get out of your head and have to look at all the time. . ."
"in the adagio, I have an angel /"
"after no end of trouble, the 'trout' finally printed in a fashion magazine"—
Wants to throw snowballs. Spaun and Hüttenbrenner duck under their open umbrellas for shelter. While out in the middle of the street, Schwind running, gloriously, waving his coat: a good imitation of flying.

17th Weather:

Psyche! Side-glances! Christ!
The Fröhlich sisters, horned or braided; head-on delight.
Corkscrew curls, clever eyes, touch of rouge, Anna Fröhlich: "*he sat there, at the window. . .*" talk about magnetism, *the heavens opened, about swimming,* legal matters; his favorite garden *rather brilliant.*

18th Weather:

"because," Schubert writes to Schober, "this dismal weather gets me down, to stretch a point. It's that *this angel* likes to make me suffer most horribly."

"So, constant up and down."

"Platform / and much remains dark. . ."

Out of the corner of my eyes I could see how he crossed the hotel lobby, whistling to himself, snipping his fingers, swaying with the rhythm, and as if coming toward me.

The next morning I ran to his room and found him still in bed, sound asleep, glasses on his nose as usual. His clothes scattered wildly and, on his desk, a sheet of paper half covered with writing.

19th Weather:

to Therese Grob: "this tiny catalyst!: I could spend hours this way trying to feel my experiences having no other vessel to keep or cultivate them."

"And sometimes heavy tears, as deep in bliss."

"Forgive my writing you in this flustered state / but the cherry trees. . ."

"To answer your plea (for the dedication): why this particular piece? *in any case, everything is dedicated to you!*"

20th Weather:

"this, this is the end of me." (Schubert to Bauernfeld)

Now we simply must stop, with all the women weeping.

Vienna, January 1976—November 1977

(from HEILIGENANSTALT, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981)

JACKSON MAC LOW

Pieces o' Six — XXXII

Merzgedicht in Memoriam *Kurt Schwitters*

First word for Kurt Schwitters: *Merz.* **If I ever move from Hannover, where I love and hate everything, I will lose the feeling that makes my *world point of view.*** 1887. Now I call myself MERZ. A *degenerate artist. Merzbilde med regnbue. Entformung, Eigengift, konsequent, Urbegriff.* This was before H.R.H. The Late Duke of Clarence & Avondale. Now it is a Merzpicture. Sorry! Average Merz-drawings: 4 to 8 inches high; some very large collages: 11 to 14 inches high, occasionally 15 to 24 inches high; but many *Aphorismer* less than 4 inches high. Never believed he was making anything but pure abstract forms. Selected discarded unfinished pages from Molling's Hannover printing shop and rode off on his bicycle with as many as he could carry. Through *Entformung* he attempted to clean away the *Eigengift* to gather them into the paradise of art's *Urbegriff.* **The picture is a self-contained work of art. *Merz ist form.* It refers to nothing outside itself. ART NEEDS CONTEMPLATIVE SELF-ABSORPTION.** Schwitters was fascinated with printed matter and regarded words and letters both as meaningful symbols and as formal design elements. **A consistent work of art can never refer to anything outside itself without loosening its ties to art.** One's first glimpses of Schwitters in the 1940s: possibly in Chicago, probably in New York. $^{A}r^{t}$ i^{s} $a^{u}t^{o}n^{o}m^{o}u^{s}$. *Auch in der Malerei verwende ich für die Komposition gern **die Brocken des täglichen Abfalls** etwa wie der Schacko aufgebaut ist aus den Reden seiner Besitzerin. **NEVER DO WHAT ANYONE ELSE HAS DONE. ALWAYS DO OTHERWISE THAN THE OTHERS.*** **I have Merzed banalities.** In 1924 he set up an advertising agency in Hannover and designed ads, notably for Pelikan ink, from one of which an ***elikan*** survives in a 1925 Merz. Mz 1926, 12. reclining emm. Schwitters had no concern for desanctification. ***Schnuppe / meine süsse puppe, / mir ist alles schnuppe, / wen ich meine schnauze / auf die deine bautze.*** Schwitters gradually dropped avant-garde devices from his writing in the later 1920s and wrote in more nearly conventional styles (needless to say, the resultant works were hardly conventional). Schacko was a parrot who pulled out all his feathers except

those on the top of his head because he couldn't sleep since the dying father kept the lights on all night because he was in such pain *he* couldn't sleep. Schwitters never pretended he didn't care about art. *Brutally Merzed wood reliefs and delicately articulated wooden constructions.* Huelsenbeck and Tzara, who agreed on little else, both saw him as a *petit bourgeois. Kommerz und Privatbank.* Some Dadaists trumpeted opposition to art while busily building artistic careers with Dadaism as an advertising device. WHEN WAS HIS WENN HANNOVERED FOR THE EIGENGIFT OF MALEREI? *Schwitters as I saw him was a man who ran away from reality.* He deeply valued art but took it very lightly. *MERZ-PICTURES ARE ABSTRACT WORKS OF ART. Black Dots and Quadrangle. If one reads Hannover backwards, one gets the combination* re von nah. *The word* re *one can read indifferently as* ***backward*** *or* ***back****. I suggest* ***backward****. Thus the translation of the word* ***Hannover*** *read backward would be* ***backward from near.*** *And that is correct, for then the translation of the word* ***Hannover*** *read forward would be* ***forward to far.*** *This means Hannover strives forward, even to infinity.* SCHWITTERS SHIED AWAY FROM LAYING BARE A **NEW REALITY** AND FROM ANTIARTISTIC GESTURES, RETAINING EVEN IN THE i-DRAWINGS A TRADITIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF ART: **IN THE CASE OF i, THE ACT OF THE ARTIST IS SOLELY THE DISASSOCIATION [*ENTFORMELUNG*] OF A GIVEN OBJECT THROUGH SINGLING OUT A PART RHYTHMIC IN ITSELF.** ***Chanson des autres is i.*** **Art as simple as writing the letter** i. *The middle vowel of the alphabet.* Schwitters taught us we can use anything to make art and even unaltered found materials may become art but the intention enacted in this praxis need include no antiartistic admixture. J 20 i-Zeichnung. *Go out into the whole world and make the truth known, the only truth there is, the truth about Anna Blume.* Had Schwitters lived to see FLUXUS, he'd have either scorned or scoffed at Maciunas's supposedly antiartistic tenets. Mz 1926, 9, with violet velvet. In a passage Schwitters underlined, Bluemner wrote that **Poetry is word composition** that **need not be in accord with logic and grammar** using a language that **at times sees itself reaching the end of all intensifications and possibilities of selection so that it is compelled to go back to its origins.** *Mz 410 something or other.* ***Frühe rundet Regen blau.*** *THE MOST INTERNATIONAL PETIT BOURGEOIS IN THE WORLD. HIS DAILY LIFE WAS ENTIRELY WITHOUT BOURGEOIS COMFORTS. A non-paying spectator on the Dadaist scene, by his very nature he* ***was*** *Dada.* Disjointed Forces. SCHWITTERS STOOD OUT among the Dadaists AS A MARVELOUS DILETTANTE. Today's *artist certifiers* would call him ***a very persistent amateur.*** ***TYLL EULENSPIEGEL.*** He'd have trouble being certified for an artist's loft in Soho. *Merz 14/15. Die Scheuche.* He lived in *ONE OF THE LIVELIEST*

CITIES IN POSTWAR GERMANY like a lower middle class Victorian. **The Kaspar David Friedrich of the Dadaist revolution.** *He simply did not have a conventional bone in his body.* WHAT WAS ONCE CRIED DOWN AS MADNESS OR A BAD JOKE TURNS INTO A SOLID CULTURAL POSSESSION, AND THE REVOLUTIONARIES OF YESTERDAY ARE THE CLASSICS OF TODAY.That's just what the revolutionaries of today must avoid: becoming the classics of tomorrow! ***Merz is as tolerant as possible with respect to its material.*** Schwitters and Wordsworth lived their last years, died, and are buried—4 miles from each other—in England's Lake District. ***MY BASIC TRAIT IS MELANCHOLY.*** Schwitters died in June 1948. Merzzeichnung 83 Zeichnung F. Why make artworks if you're opposed to art? ***My wet nurse's milk was too thick and there was too little, because she nursed me beyond the lawfully allowed time.*** Playing Card Harmonica. *The materials bring into the abstract formal performance a piece of familiar reality.* Schwitters had a little garden in Isernhagen, a village near Hannover: ***Roses, strawberries, a man-made hill, and an artificial pond. In the fall of 1901, village boys tore up the garden while I looked on. The excitement brought on St. Vitus's dance. I was sick for two years, totally disabled.*** Das Merzbild. ELIKAN MERZED A KONSEQUENT BROCKEN. He loved each discarded bit or snippet for itself though he made it take its place in what he would have called an abstract structure. ***Striving for expression in a work of art seems to me injurious to art.*** Mz 280 Red Pen (for Lisker). He cared nothing about contradicting himself even though he thought that artworks had to be *konsequent.* ***ONE CAN EVEN SHOUT OUT THROUGH REFUSE, AND THIS IS WHAT I DID, NAILING AND GLUING IT TOGETHER. I CALLED IT*** MERZ, ***IT WAS A PRAYER ABOUT THE VICTORIOUS END OF THE WAR, VICTORIOUS AS ONCE AGAIN PEACE HAD WON IN THE END; EVERYTHING HAD BROKEN DOWN IN ANY CASE AND NEW THINGS HAD TO BE MADE OUT OF FRAGMENTS: AND THIS IS MERZ. IT WAS LIKE AN IMAGE OF THE REVOLUTION WITHIN ME, NOT AS IT WAS BUT AS IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN.*** Construction for Noble Ladies. *Such political convictions as he had were more against than for—against war, against the stupidity of institutions, programs, phrasemaking of every kind.* People such as Huelsenbeck (and even Schwitters himself) thought him nonpolitical because he espoused no easily recognized ideology, not realizing that Schwitters' artworks function politically by making the viewer look at the most banal detritus with (as poor Maciunas would have put it) *an art attitude,* which by distancing the objects of everyday experience allows her to see them in a strange context and from a new angle, so that whatever has been taken for granted may

begin to be questioned and eventually illumined by critical reflection. *The increasing formalization of Schwitters' collages and relief assemblages in the early 1920s necessarily inhibited the more fantastic side of his artistic personality.* Siegbild (Victory Picture), c. 1925. Schwitters was hardly ever a pure image maker, unlike most Dada artists, who transmitted Dada's revolutionary message mainly through image-content. *Dada was ideological without a specific ideology and purposive without a purpose, which is why Dada actions and objects could be considered* artistic. FAUVIST COLOR WITHIN A CUBIST SYSTEM. *Mz 387. Kaltensundheim, 1922:* Merzed the year *this* Merzer was born. *Schwitters' method is that of Realism made from real things.* This is a **positive** link with FLUXUS—this kind of Realism is much more important to most so-called FLUXUS artists than the anti-art component, which Maciunas himself seems largely to have discounted before his untimely death. ***Surrealism is litterature*** [sic] ***with wrong means, not painting, therefore wrong.*** *Merzbild Alf.* Schwitters *had always insisted that the individual potency of his materials should be effaced in the process of picture-making,* but in 1937-39 *his very untypical interest in* objets trouvés and *the blatant literal presence of objects themselves* in collages, *grotesque faces and still-life objects* in certain paintings *in the new* Pointilliste *style,* late reliefs including *smooth biomorphic forms,* and a *general shift to illusionistic space and organic, curvilinear elements* are ascribed variously to the influence of *1930s Surrealism* or to *the influence of natural scenery* after his move to Norway. What critics who point with seeming surprise at such *inconsistencies* don't seem to realize is that Schwitters was only concerned with consistency *within* each work. DO I CONTRADICT MYSELF? VERY WELL THEN I CONTRADICT MYSELF, (I AM LARGE, I CONTAIN MULTITUDES.) DEINE DESANCTIFICATION IST TÄGLICHEN AUFGEBAUT WIE KASPAR WORDSWORTH ODER FRIEDRICH MACIUNAS, SCHACKO BLUEMNER ODER ANNA BLUME. Schwitters' mind and practice roved freely over all the possibilities available to artists during the first half of the 20th century. ***Combine all branches of art into an artistic unity.*** *Mz 33. Verbürgt rein.* **We see in his work not only the picture of a new instinctive order but a picture of its creation: since the material components that create this order are drawn from quite an opposite state, the tension and competitions between parts and whole are necessarily given along with the new order itself.** His works transcended his conscious abstract-art ideology, embodying a much more complete theory of art, though he might have been chagrined if told *they imitate nature in its complexity.* *THE LARGER LATE ASSEMBLAGES AND COLLAGES, ESPECIALLY, HAVE A FORTHRIGHT-*

NESS AND GENEROSITY ABOUT THEM THAT MAKES THE PRECEDING, CONSTRUCTIVIST-STYLE WORK SEEM OVERCONTROLLED BY CONTRAST. Der Schokaladenkasten, Anna Blume, Box 7. He feared inexactness lest it fall into mere *RANDOMNESS.* **Even close friends found it difficult to reconcile Schwitters' jovial, extrovert, and clownish nature with the seriousness of his commitment to art.** The liveliness of Schwitters' art may well have arisen from the widely noted ***contradictoriness of his existence,*** and that very *contradictoriness* prevented MERZ from becoming an ideology, allowing him to embrace a myriad of materials and methods and to approach, willy-nilly, *imitating nature in its manner of operation.* **DO NOT ASK FOR SOULFUL MOODS.** THE DADAIST IS A MIRROR CARRIER. *There is no such thing as inchoate experience.* Perception is always already preconstituted by the perceiver. **A Merzer met Roof on the roof.** One may respect, like, enjoy, or be delighted or even made ecstatic by the works of a number of artists, but those of a few—in this century Stein, Satie, and Schwitters, Klee and Cage, and still inescapably Schoenberg, and not a large handful of others—one loves. Industriegebiet. Aq. 37. **The Cathedral broke through the ceiling and aspiring upward pushed into Kurt's and Helma's apartment above, leaving one of the rooms with no floor.** *Merzbau Hannover,* begun by Schwitters around 1923 and continually worked upon for nearly fourteen years, was twenty years later—five years before his death—destroyed by Allied bombs. *During the 1930s Schwitters often worked day and night on his* ***useless construction.*** Merzbau in Little Langdale (Merz Barn). On New Year's Day 1937 (ten months before this Merzer began writing poems) Schwitters left Germany, never again to see *Merzbau Hannover,* and that year began the second *Merzbau,* in Lysaker, Norway, which was destroyed by fire in 1951; ten years after beginning the second and six months before he died, he began the third and last *Merzbau* (the *Merz Barn*) on Cylinder's Farm in Little Langdale, near Ambleside, in the Lake District of England, the one more or less completed wall of which, though moved, still survives. **Oh Du,** Kurt Schwitters, **Du!**

[With special thanks to Nick Piombino (poet, poeticist, psychoanalyst), who kindly lent the poet his Schwitters library, notably the two books most often quoted, adapted, excerpted, paraphrased, etc., in the course of constructing this *Merzgedicht*: Werner Schmalen-

bach's *Kurt Schwitters* (Copyright 1967 in West Germany by Verlag M. DuMont Shauberg, Cologne; English version published by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, 1977) and John Elderfield's *Kurt Schwitters* (Copyright © 1985 by Thames and Hudson Ltd., London; paperback edition specially printed for the Museum of Modern Art, New York, by Thames and Hudson Inc., New York, 1985), to the authors and publishers of which the poet is grateful for the many scattered sentences and shorter excerpts informally quoted, paraphrased, adapted, and/or modified throughout this poem; and with special thanks to Michael Erlhoff and Klaus Stadtmüller, the editors of the *Kurt Schwitters Almanach 1987* (a birth-centennial "Hommage á Kurt Schwitters") for inviting me to send them a contribution, thereby inspiring me to write this poem.]

February-March 1987
New York

July 3, 1987

to the editor

It was with considerable amusement at what inexplicable passion at least Poetry's *polemics* still can rouse, bemused sympathy for Sven Birkerts who after all had only committed the lèse-majesté of reporting his own honest perceptions, & not a little malicious glee at finding this long overdue Ashbery-bashing smuggled into the redoubtable pages of *Sulfur*, that I read the reviews in 19. Perhaps I can offer a more moderate opinion than any of those, since I am so far from being a partisan of style-politics, that I write in both rhymed verse & free, contiguous linear sentences & montaged fragments of accidence. . .

John Ashbery deserves neither such acclaim nor such abuse as he has been fortunate enough, among all the current practitioners of the noble art merely a name repeated about as often as one of the lesser pop-icons, to receive. I think he is our best nonsense poet since Lewis Carroll, & I mean that without irony, for he infuses great sophistication of tone & deft subtle whimsy, into what had almost lapsed as a genre. But it's really too bad he writes at a time when the "Avant Garde" has lost all definition either, as a salient or an enclave of outcasts. Those who need a cutting-edge to whet their criticism upon, might more fruitfully turn to many another *serious* poet! What everybody on his side implicitly assumes, is that *any* non-sense automatically carries its hidden burden of subterranean significance; & they are right anyway to defend this very precious vein from the rationalists' strip-mining analyses. Really, though—does Ashbery unearth spine-tingling irrational insights, endlessly fascinating image-complexes, or sublime proto-mythologies, in his bland suburban reveries? *He doesn't try.* That's not his game, any more than Disney World is about a future utopia. . .

So please, let's recognize that the Unconscious, as a creative source, gives mild trophies from its littoral shallows, & let's honor them as such; but not to the extent of calling every washed-up oddity, Moby-Dick. *You will know it by its power*, not by what cleverness can be wrapped around it.

—MICHAEL HELSEM

June 30, 1987

Dear Clayton,

I probably should have known better than to venture a criticism of Ashbery in the pages of SULFUR. Indeed, after reading the responses of The Gang of Four (Weinberger, Coolidge, Palmer and Rasula) I felt like some 60 year old Republican booster beating his stick on behalf of law & order. Needless to say, I didn't like that image of myself and I had to do some hard thinking and re-thinking. Is it possible to feel at once chastened and unregenerate? If so, that's how I feel. A few follow-up remarks are probably in order.

First, Coolidge asserts that I do not appear "to have been there." That is, that I was not writing as one who has lived with Ashbery's poetry for years. He's right—though I'm not sure that that disqualifies me from tendering my impressions and judgments. To the contrary, a "Martian" approach may sometimes allow for perspectives otherwise unavailable.

OK, I haven't lived with the work as some others have. But it's not for want of trying. Time and again during the last decade, I have tried to surmount the barrier; I have wanted to get inside the magic circle of his language, to arrive at that place that *must* exist—otherwise he would not be so popular. I have not been able to, as must be obvious. You'll remember that I warned you of my feelings (my bias, if you will) when we discussed doing the review. We both agreed, finally, that it would be useful / interesting / provocative for me to explain my difficulties with the work. It has, for me at least, been all those things.

I have to take issue with Coolidge's contention that my comments are of questionable value because I have not "entered" the work. Does he mean by that that I have not given myself entirely over to it and let it work its fabled magic on me? Or is he saying, somehow, that one must approach it with love in his heart before the beauty will declare itself? It seems to me that a work of art must petition us, and not vice-versa. I put myself (a child of the age, moderately well-read, neutralized in expectation) before the poems. I found some beauty (I said so), some surprise (which diminished as I read, as similar moves were made over and over) and a great deal of hokum (empty vamping, featureless simulation of drifty internal states). That's what I found, and that's what I said I found. The sniping tone of some of the responses suggests that a real exchange of ideas and opinions is only possible among the converted.

There I go, getting worked up again. I fully intended—and the comments of my respondents persuaded me of this—to say some nicer things. I found—really—that the best of the work makes a beautiful, melancholy, even profoundly stirring music. It laments the dispersal of

meaning even as it enacts it. But this work seems to me to make up a small part of that ample volume. Too much of the other poetry merely rehearses dispersal—one theme and a dozen key changes to play it in. I was assailed for my conservatism. That's wrong. I'm not so straight-laced that any departure from nailed-down certainties upsets me; I don't clutch at Arnoldian values with a tightened sphincter. The fact is that I register so many of Ashbery's departures as gratuitous. In my view, they make their capital through easy and programmatic subversions of expectation. I don't mind pronominal confusion—I do mind the *tic* of pronominal confusion. My point was that Ashbery's persistent and highly-mannered mode of diffusing linguistic stability—the fact that he does it for its own sake—ultimately weakens, rather than strengthens, the language of the tribe. I can take, and enjoy, a high degree of polyvalence. I don't require a narrative line or a nugget of "message." But I have to believe that the poet's undertaking itself is meaningful—that it comes from his heart and soul. I don't feel that often enough when reading this poetry. I'm sorry.

As for my discussion of deconstruction (obviously simplified), I hope that it's clear that I was in no way linking Ashbery's work with the theory itself. I was merely remarking a certain similarity of impulse: that both theory and poetry achieve their effects or results through a shattering of the molecule chain of stable signification. Is this bad? In the short run, no. In the short run it energizes and liberates; it shakes up the mixture of things. But I would not like to see the practice become a foundation for the poetic of the future. (And here Weinberger is right: some of the impetus for my piece did have to do with Ashbery's enormous influence.) For when the deeper implications of the practice are traced out—and it was these that concerned me—then we see how the nerve center of poetry may be paralyzed. To deem the fission of sense not a poetic option but as a poetic aim, is to loose mere anarchy upon the word. I am conservative enough to believe that poetry functions as a kind of treatment facility for the polluted waterways of our language. If there is a crisis in our written arts—and I think there is—it derives from the progressive evacuation of meaning from our signs.

A last word. My respondents were happy enough to poke the dagger where they could. I do wish that at least one of them had done the more difficult thing: to take a particular passage (especially one of the contested passages) and show me just how it comes by its wondrousness. I would like to join you all inside the magic circle—but you will have to show me how to get in.

Yours,
SVEN BIRKERTS

HOWL AND ITS ENEMIES: THE GENTEEL REACTION

In the December 1984 issue of the *Boston Review*, Allen Ginsberg's *Collected Poems* received the following mini-review from Richard Howard:

> The MacPherson *de nos jours*, this gathered assortment, fragments shored, limbs remembered, adds up to an astonishing confession: it may not be poetry at all, it is always testimony, a kind of processional martyrology—in that martyrs are witnesses to the truth. (33)

Period. Which is to say, with a dismissive wave of the hand, that Ginsberg's oeuvre, like James MacPherson's invention of the Celtic bard Ossian, whose pseudo-primitive epics delighted his eighteenth-century audience, is no more than inspired fakery. "It may not be poetry at all."

To those of us who have followed Ginsberg's career from its inception, Howard's bemused dismissal has an air of *deja vu*. It recalls the now notorious and muchly reprinted 1957 review of *Howl* by Ginsberg's fellow-Columbia student and poet-friend John Hollander. To wit:

> It is only fair to Allen Ginsberg. . .to remark on the utter lack of decorum of any kind in this dreadful little volume. I believe that the title of his long poem "Howl," is meant to be a noun, but I can't help taking it as an imperative. . . .*Howl* seems to have emerged under the influence of a kind of literary *Festspiel* held at frequent intervals on the West Coast, in the course of which various poets, "with radiant cool eyes," undoubtedly, read their works before audiences of writhing and adoring youths. (26-27)

Again, the argument is that *Howl* is fake, hype, media event—anything, in short, but Poetry with a capital P.

In the thirty-year span between Hollander's reference to that "dreadful little volume" called *Howl* and Howard's dismissal of the whole *Collected Poems* as "the MacPherson *de nos jours*," *Howl* has become one of the most famous and celebrated poems in the world. In the sixties and seventies, for that matter, Ginsberg's poetry gained wide acceptance in the Academy, critics, scholars, and fellow-poets taking pains to demonstrate that the so-called confessional rant was by no means formless, that indeed Beat poetry, Ginsberg-style, was remarkable for its polyglot learning, for the complexity of its derivations and intertexts.

In recent years, however, a curious reaction has set in. We can attribute a certain measure of the current hostility to Ginsberg on the part of newspaper and journal reviewers[1] to what is called the New Conservatism

or the Age of Reagan, but this is only part of the story, the fact being that most of the genteel young men who have dismissed the *Collected Poems* and who will, no doubt, dismiss Barry Miles' annotated edition of *Howl,* came of age in the sixties and espouse the left-wing politics now *de rigueur* in English departments across the country. No, what I should like to call here the Neo-New, where New refers to the New Criticism, has a more complex derivation.

Reviewing the *Collected Poems* for *The New Criterion,* Bruce Bawer, himself an aspiring poet and the author of a book on the "tragic generation" of Lowell, Schwartz, Berryman, and Jarrell, writes:

> To read such poems as these back-to-back. . .is to be stunned by the oversimplification, the repetition, the self-indulgence, the egocentrism, the utter inability to develop a theme. Doesn't [Ginsberg] ever, one wonders, get sick of reiterating these banalities? Doesn't he ever yearn to get beyond the surface cliche, to develop a more sophisticated view of the world, and to express it in more memorable and meticulously chosen words?

The "utter inability to develop a theme" or to "express it in. . .meticulously chosen words," the inability, as Bawer later puts it, to produce "a finely turned phrase"—inherent in such strictures is a curiously pre-Structuralist faith in language as vehicle, as a conduit that leads directly from the speaking subject to a meaning above and outside the signifier. One should have, so it seems, a "view of the world" that is sufficiently "sophisticated"; one then explores, as Bawer says, "the complexities that make the actual world interesting and frustrating and *real,*" assuming, of course, that one knows what reality is.

A similar charge is made by Roger Rosenblatt in *The New Republic:*

> If one makes comparisons with Eliot, Pound, Lowell, Stevens, or even with Ransom or Robert Penn Warren, the collected Ginsberg does not stand a chance. . . .the bulk of [Ginsberg's] work shows no philosophical growth. . .and rarely any depth. [As for *Howl*], "it is a poem worth rereading, especially if one deluded oneself into liking it when it made its loud debut." (33-34)

No philosophical growth, rarely any depth—here again, is the dismay at the poet's "utter inability to develop a theme." Rosenblatt's complaint is echoed by Lachlan MacKinnon's suggestion, in his *Times Literary Supplement* review, that Ginsberg can only write out of his personal life because he lacks "a true culture" (574). But perhaps the "Neo-New" case against Ginsberg is presented most forcefully by the young poet-professor

Mark Jarman in an omnibus review for the *Hudson Review*. This piece covers thirteen American poets born between 1900 and 1960 and ranging from Elder Olson and Shirley Kaufman to Jarman's contemporaries, Gary Soto, Eric Pankey, and Sharona Ben-Tov. In this eclectic context, Ginsberg's *Collected* gets short shrift (less than a page), Jarman observing that "Ginsberg was not a promising young poet nor has he become a mature older poet. But for about ten years, from 1955 to 1965, his writing anticipated American life, especially the youth subculture built around music and drugs and the now waning fascination with Eastern religions" (330).

The poetry, that is to say, is judged thematically and since the "themes" are, so Jarman argues, now passe, so is much of Ginsberg's poetry:

> We know that sexuality is as various as American life is supposed to be. We know our government's abuse of its immense military power is madness. Drugs have been sources of insight rather than simply recreational. A spiritual alternative to western religion exists in the orient. The list sounds dismissive only because to mention these themes of Ginsberg is to realize, unfortunately, how ironic they have become, how much a source of parody. (331)

A source of parody is precisely what these so-called themes have become: witness Christopher Buckley and Paul Slansky's "Yowl: For Jay McInerney," which is printed in the December 8, 1986 issue of *The New Republic* as a commemorative offering "On the 30th anniversary of 'Howl'." I shall come back to this parody in a moment, but first it might be helpful to look at a few poems by those who do, according to Jarman and his colleagues, have the "ability" to "develop a theme" or invent what Bruce Bawer calls "a finely turned phrase," those poets who are evidently not guilty of self-indulgence or oversimplification, concentrating as they do on the "complexities" that, in Bawer's words, "make the actual world interesting and frustrating and *real*."

One such poet is Eric Pankey, last year's winner of the Walt Whitman Award for a book called *For the New Year* (Atheneum). A Pankey poem called "Tending the Garden" is praised by Jarman for its complex dramatic strategies: "Pankey imagines Horatio at Elsinore, speaks in the voice of Cain, addresses Vallejo, and assumes the characters of a railroad bull and a survivor of a Nazi death camp." "The latter," remarks Jarman, "may seem an overworked subject, but I would argue that Pankey's clarity makes the poem exceptional," and he cites the following passage:

> The other prisoners were envious
> of our duty. It was, at times, hard work,

but the work, it seems, promoted our health.
I was determined to stay well, to last
through the coming winter and not end up
face up in a grave my own hands had dug.

And Jarman comments: "In writing of such apparent simplicity, words like *duty, promoted, determined,* and *health* resonate with their special meaning, and the cunning word play of "end up / face up" is nearly subliminal. Frankly, I admire this, for the narrative poem as such might seem to have no time for these effects" (339).

Such a reading recalls nothing so much as those Brooks-and-Warren exercises where the student would learn to identify the speaker (never, according to rule 1, the poet himself but always a persona!) and comment on the poem's way of saying one thing but meaning another—which is to say, its irony (Rule 2). To call the torturous task of the death-camp survivor "the work," to use the casual "end up" as a lead in to "face up"—this, one surmises, is to provide us with "meticulously chosen words." Except that the real New Criticism, as opposed to its "neo" version, would have recognized this passage from the ironically entitled "Tending the Garden" (get it?) as pure contrivance. W.K. Wimsatt, for one, would have asked some hard questions about the function of the iambic pentameter in the poem.

Another poem Jarman singles out for praise is Dick Allen's "Overnight in the Guest House of the Mystic," which contains these lines:

I dream
of histories ahead, the quasars flowering
upon the edge of space; odd specks of light
like fireflies in the pines, the first
new cities of another galaxy.

Which marks me of my time—which turns
almost helplessly between
huge shadows and the drifting stars,
a boat upon a boat at sea
floating in a bottle, each uplifted sail
raised to catch a wind that cannot be.

"Allen's expression of hope in what lies beyond," comments the reviewer, "is finally an integrated one. . .for he knows the limitation of his subject matter. . . .His dream does indeed mark him of his time, as it does many another, yet the wisdom of the statement—the admission—is rare" (333).

Note the classic New Critical terminology—"integrated," "limitation," "wisdom of the statement," and "admission" that is "rare." Thematics are all, blinding the reader to the real "limitation" of this little poem, which is its inability to convince us that any conceivable voice is actually saying the things in question. One doesn't in fact "dream / of histories ahead" but only of a specific historical event; again, it is hard to conceive of a dream in which "odd specks of light" are viewed as being, in the most reasonable of tried and true similes, "like fireflies in the pines." But even these images are not as bathetic as the moralizing statement of the second stanza: "Which marks me of my time. . . ." A latter-day William Vaughan Moody, this melancholy speaker is "helplessly" positioned "between / huge shadows and the drifting stars." Stars have been poetically "drifting" from Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* on down; it is reassuring, I suppose, to know that even quasars can't change these Romantic verities. And then Allen sees himself as "a boat upon a boat at sea"—there's an original metaphor—a boat, moreover, "floating in a bottle." And now, with the click of a spring, comes the final recognition that "each uplifted sail / raised to catch a wind that cannot be." "Sea" / "be"—the perfect closural rhyme underscores the poet's mournful conclusion.

"The wisdom of the statement," says Jarman, "the admission—is rare." But what is it that is being admitted? Does Allen know anything we don't know about galaxies and quasars? Is his point of view in any way special? Do those who are "of their time" usually tell us they are so? And if the poet is so uncertain about the future, how does he know, with such metrical and rhyming certainty, that the "uplifted sail [is] raised to catch a wind that cannot be"?

These questions do not occur to Jarman because his central postulate is the bifurcation of form and content. The poet, it is implied, first chooses his subject matter—something that is important, serious, and of its time—and then "expresses" it using as many "finely turned phrases" (Bruce Bawer's term) as possible. "Knowing the limitation of [one's] subject matter" thus becomes the cardinal virtue. And, given this aesthetic stance, a poem like *Howl* is perceived as nothing but a loose, baggy monster. "*Howl,* once effective as counter-culture manifesto," writes R.Z. Sheppard in *Time* magazine, "is now an unconvincing historical oddity" (72). But *Howl* was never a counter-culture or any other kind of manifesto, and mistaking Ginsberg's brilliant Dada / Surrealist autobiographical poem, with its particular blend of the comic and the serious, the every-day and the visionary, the pedestrian and the fantastic for something as pat as a "counter-culture manifesto" leads to the writing of such "clever" parodies as the Buckley-Slansky "Yowl," to which I now turn.

Like *The Waste Land, Howl* has a stylistic signature so singular that nothing is easier than to parodize it. Buckley's satire, which purports to take

on both Ginsberg's vatic excesses and eighties-Yuppiedom, opens as follows:

> I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by stress
> frazzled overtired burnt-out
> jogging through suburban streets at dawn
> as suggested by the late James Fixx,
> career-minded yupsters burning for an Amstel Light
> watching Stupid Pet Tricks,
> who upwardly mobile and designer'd and bright eyed and high
> sat up working in the track-lit glow of the Tribeca loft
> skimming through the Day Timer while padding the expense
> account. . . .
> who ate chocolate croissants in outdoor cafes and drank
> blush wine on Columbus Avenue washed down with a little
> Percodan with Dove bars with Diet Coke with Lean Cuisine

The authors of "Yowl" are obviously having a good time finding substitutions for Ginsberg's images: the "angry fix" of the "angelheaded hipsters" becoming, in a nice little joke, the late James Fixx of jogging fame, or the "stale beer" of *Howl* becoming the Diet Coke of "Yowl." But the one-dimensional expose of the "upwardly mobile and designer'd and bright-eyed" Yuppie, who "sat up working in the track-lit glow of the Tribeca loft," only serves to put into bold relief the very real complexities of *Howl*.

Take the famous opening line,

> I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness,
> starving hysterical naked

In the first draft, the three adjectives were "starving mystical naked," and surely Ginsberg is not exaggerating when he says, in the notes for the new Harper edition, that this is a "Crucial revision," "hysterical" providing "a key to the tone of the poem." He observes, "Tho the initial idealistic impulse of the line went one way, afterthought noticed bathos, and common sense dictated 'hysteria'. . . .The poem's tone is in this mixture of empathy and shrewdness" (124). Which is to say that the connotations of "hysterical" more or less throw the poem's gear into reverse, calling into question the purported darkness of the poet's vision.[2]

Indeed, *Howl* is itself much funnier—and much more subtly satiric—than its 1986 parody. Take the strophe

> who vanished into nowhere Zen New Jersey leaving a trail of
> ambiguous picture postcards of Atlantic City Hall

Those who complain of the poem's repetitiveness, its seemingly endless cataloguing of "who" clauses ("This continues," declares John Hollander, "sponging on one's toleration, for pages and pages" [26]), fail to recognize what is actually a marked condensation. The first draft of the strophe above reads:

> who vanished into the New Jersies of amnesia
> posting cryptic picture postcards
> of Belmar City Hall and last years sharks (13)

And Ginsberg's note tells us that this is a "Composite image of a few post-college 'career failures' characteristic of 1950s, including author's own two-year sojourn in Paterson 1950-51 on leaving Columbia Psychiatric Institute. Author's family spent many 1930s summers at the shore in Belmar—'Atlantic City,' final draft. 'Sharks' ref. recurrent seaside newspaper reports and souvenir postcards" (126).

The note testifies to the autobiographical source of this and almost every image in *Howl;* it also counters Ginsberg's own professed aesthetic of "First thought, best thought," of "Spontaneous insight" as "motif and method" of composition (*Collected Poems,* xx). For when "the New Jersies of amnesia" become the "nowhere Zen New Jersey," the bleak memory of Paterson summers gives way to a teasing oxymoron: a "nowhere" New Jersey that is also "Zen" can't be all bad, can it? Again, the specificity of "sharks" as a local term for the waste paper products of the area gives way to the comic image of the postcard trail, left behind by the poet and his friends. Are they dirty pictures? Threats to City Hall? The poem opens possibilities that will now be picked up in the account of the "bop kabbalah" that is its metier.

The notion of "Bop kabbalah" also defines the syntactic drive of *Howl.* Ginsberg's syntax typically puts parts of speech into "incorrect" slots so as to make us rethink their relationship. Thus we read:

> who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up
> smoking in the supernatural darkness of cold-water
> flats floating across the tops of cities
> contemplating jazz

where the placement of the heavily stressed nouns "poverty" and "tatters" in adjective slots creates the very jazz syncopation the poet is describing, even as the participle "floating" can refer to the "flats" as well as the relative pronoun "who," and even as the syntax suggests that it is the "cities" that are "contemplating jazz." The heavily alliterative, aggressively grinding and "difficult" rhythm ("of cold-water flats floating across the tops of cities contemplating jazz") is wholly flattened out in "Yowl":

who hollow-eyed and febrile read the theater reviews in
unread issues of the *New Yorker* yes the *New Yorker*

a locution that suggests to me a wholly one-dimensional reading of the parent text. Thus, when a critic like Lachlan MacKinnon announces that Ginsberg "has been too lazy to shape his material as it, like any material, demands," one wonders whether "lazy" doesn't apply to the reader rather than to the poem.

By the time "Yowl" winds up its "I'm with you" litany with the final couplet, "I'm with you on the Upper East Side / looking for myself in *People* magazine," it has become clear that Yuppiedom is being satirized by those who are themselves its charter members. The clever knowingness of the parody, like Lachlan MacKinnon's reference to the "cultural sterility" of Ginsberg's *Collected Poems,* or Roger Rosenblatt's patronizing dismissal of *Howl* ("One can grow giggly learning that 'the best minds' of the poet's generation 'copulated ecstatic and insatiate with a bottle of beer'. . . .It makes you wonder what the second best minds were doing") point to the curious paradox inherent in what I have called the "Neo-New" movement in letters—the paradox that, for all the talk of culture and complexity, for all the outcry against the formlessness, the simplification, the self-indulgence, and the "laziness" of Ginsberg's poetry, the young Ivy Leaguers who are casting the stones are quite simply not very good readers.

Why should this be the case? My own hunch—and I can do no more here than to make tentative suggestions—is that the emphasis on theory in the "English" and "Comparative Literature" curriculum of the past decade or so has produced a curious split. On the one hand, we now train students to follow, say, Paul de Man's most arcane arguments, to watch and understand as he uncovers the hidden place where a given text unravels and reveals its real workings. Or again, we train students in Marxist theory, teaching them how to determine the covert power relations in Shakespeare's comedies or to define the role of exchange value in Emily Dickinson. It is a case of ***reading for*** rather than ***reading,*** and hence the exemplary texts are likely to be the safe ones—the texts everyone ***knows*** to be "great literature" so that we can get down to the business of submitting them to this or that theoretical paradigm.

On the other side of the academic fence, we find the Poetry Writing Workshop, that last bastion of those who want to have nothing to do with what they take to be the arid and abstract discourse of the theoreticians. In the writing workshop, "understanding poetry," as Brooks and Warren called it in their famous book by that title, is still considered a worthwhile exercise: questions of voice, meter, metaphor, and structure, questions now denigrated by the theory camp as "mere" formalism, continue to be

asked. But the difficulty—and there was no real precedent for this in the era of *Understanding Poetry*—is that today's workshop poet is likely not to read anything *but* poetry, which is to say, given our elaborate system of grants, fellowships, summer workshops, and mini-seminars, primarily the poetry of his fellow-poets. As such, the practice and reception of poetry becomes increasingly a kind of cottage industry, a middlebrow pastime no more likely to produce widespread enthusiasm than it is likely to disturb anyone.

Given this climate, the bardic-comic voice of an Allen Ginsberg can hardly help but be perceived as some sort of irrelevancy. For if poetry is a middlebrow pastime, its watchwords become safety, respectability, correctness, and "interesting" subject matter well put: "What oft was thought but ne'er so well express'd." Moreover—and here the politics of poetry reviewing comes in—young poet-critic X must be careful to say nice things about poets Y and Z for by next week they will be reviewing his or her own new book. Ginsberg, on the other hand, is sure to review neither X, Y, nor Z, and so there isn't much incentive to be polite.

As such, Ginsberg's now-immortal "Rockland," where "we are great writers on the same dreadful typewriter," has become, in the late eighties, the Upper East Side of "Yowl," where "I'm with you. . .pricing modems." But not quite. For in a curious sense, it is *Howl* that has the last word, containing as it does its own parody of its future parodists, which is to say of all the Sad Young Men "who were burned alive in their innocent flannel suits on Madison Avenue / amid blasts of leaden verse & the tanked-up clatter of the iron regiments of fashion. . .& the mustard gas of sinister intelligent editors." All that gas, after all, will burn away "under the tubercular sky."

NOTES

[1]Aside from the hostile reviews cited in the text, see Atlas (lukewarm), Donoghue (fairly dismissive), and Richman, who concludes that Ginsberg's poetry is best characterized as "sleaze."

For generally favorable reviews, see Diggory, Hyde, Molesworth, Perloff, and Vendler.

[2] For a fuller account of such "reversals," see Perloff, "A Lion in Our Living Room."

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—MARJORIE PERLOFF

JAMES JESUS ANGLETON 1917-1987

On his strange mission to America in 1939 to persuade Roosevelt not to enter the European war, Ezra Pound took time from his meetings with low-level bureaucrats and high-level avant-gardists to travel to New Haven to visit a Yale undergraduate, Jim Angleton. Jim, with his roommate Reed Whittemore, was editing a poetry magazine called *Furioso*. Pound's "Introductory Textbook" had appeared in the first number, and Pound was as eager as ever to tell the young editors whom to publish.

Details of that encounter are not known: the two major Pound biographies grant the incident only one, nearly identical sentence each. After four issues, *Furioso* suspended publication, to be resumed after the war with Whittemore as sole editor. Angleton was published only once, in the *Yale Literary Magazine*: a bad poem with a prophetic title, "The Immaculate Conversion." In the middle of the war, Angleton was converted—"turned," he would say—by his English professor, Norman Holmes Pearson, from poetry to its twin, espionage.

Pearson, a Boston aristocrat and a diminutive cripple, is now remembered for his writings on 19th century American literature, the extraordinary *Poets of the English Language* anthologies he edited with W.H. Auden, and as H.D.'s editor and literary executor. In 1943, despite the fact that he had been a Nazi sympathizer until the invasion of Poland, Pearson was sent to London to become the head of X-2, the counter-intelligence branch of the O.S.S. There he learned the British "Double Cross" system of psychologically coercing captured enemy agents into working for one's own side. Pearson's counterpart (and nemesis) at the British M.I.6 was Kim Philby; his code name was Puritan; in espionage literature he is called "the father of American counter-intelligence." After the war, Pearson returned to Yale, where he continued to recruit students for the newly-formed C.I.A. He served on the board of advisors to Pound's Square Dollar Books, which folded after its publishers, Kasper and Horton, went to jail for instigating segregationist riots.

Angleton turned out to be Pearson's greatest find. When he surfaced in public in the late 1970s, he was revealed to be the chief of C.I.A. counter-intelligence, the "ultra top secret deep snow" unit. He had files on two million Americans; had directed an operation that infiltrated the U.S. Postal Service, opened and photographed 200,000 personal letters; believed that Lee Harvey Oswald and Henry Kissinger were KGB spies, and that the Black Panthers were a North Korean front operation. He had been Kim Philby's best friend. For twenty years after the defection of Philby's partners Burgess and MacLean, Philby and Angleton were locked in a "deep game" of double and double-double crossing—a "wilderness of mirrors," Angleton called it, quoting Eliot—as Angleton decimated the ranks of the C.I.A.

in search of double agents, the "moles." Angleton's boss, Allen Dulles, was kept uninformed, and Mrs. Angleton, after 31 years of marriage, had never known her husband's position.

Angleton, who kept reading poetry all his life, liked to recruit agents from the Yale English department. He claimed that those trained in the New Criticism, with its seven types of ambiguity, were particularly suited to the interpretation of intelligence data. Consider, after all, the ways a spy's message may be read:

1) It is written by a loyal agent and its information is accurate.

2) It is written by a loyal agent but its information is only partially accurate.

3) It is written by a loyal agent but its information is entirely inaccurate.

4) It is written by a double agent and its information is completely false.

5) It is written by a double agent but its information is partially true so that the false parts will be believed.

6) It is written by a double agent but its information is entirely true so that the allegiance of the agent will not be discovered.

Moreover, the message is written in code, and liable to the vagaries of translation. And it is written in a highly condensed language, whose meanings can offer varying interpretations. Like a poem, the message is only as good as its reader. Roosevelt refused to believe a report on the imminent invasion of Pearl Harbor; the F.B.I. thought that the Pisan Cantos were the encoded communications of a spy.

There is a book to be written on poetry and espionage. A spy must know where the best information is, collect it without being discovered, and safely transmit it. In antiquity, the bards and troubadours were perfect for the task: they were free to wander; they had access to the courts; and as poets they relied on their powers of observation to compose and their memories to recite. The first literary spy is the creation of such a bard: Odysseus, who (in Book IV of the Odyssey) disguises himself as a beggar to gather intelligence in a Trojan city.

Chaucer was a spy on the continent for John of Gaunt. Marlowe was recruited by Sir Francis Walsingham—Elizabeth's great spymaster and Sir Philip Sidney's father-in-law—to inform on English students who were enjoying Catholic hospitality in Rheims. (And later, he was murdered by Walsingham's men because of his involvement with Sir Walter Ralegh, another spy, in a plot to depose the queen—a murder that was neatly staged to look like a barroom brawl.) Wordsworth was a spy in France; Basil Bunting a spy in Persia. Whittaker Chambers started out as an Objectivist poet.

Poetry arose as the voice of sacred power—the formula, the mantra, the oracle, the prayer: rhythmical condensed speech. Because of taboo, it was a voice that spoke in metaphors: the only way to express the inexpressible. Even as it lost its sacred function, the power continued in the poem: poetry, said Dickinson, takes the top of your head off.

That split—between the power of the poem and the powerlessness of the poet in society—has led poets into lives quite similar to the lives of spies. Poets have believed that they are the "unacknowledged legislators." They have been attracted to secret societies, from the Elizabethan School of Night (whose members included Ralegh, Spenser, Chapman and Marlowe, as well as Thomas Hariot and the alchemist Walter Warner) to Yeats' Golden Dawn. They have preferred to publish anonymously or under pseudonyms. They are—like Milton writing his elegy before he had a suitable corpse—masters at the counterfeiting of emotions. They band together into groups and movements that, like Angleton's C.I.A., become obsessed with betrayals from within. They encode private messages and secret strengths into their poems, like Zukofsky embedding the formula for a conic section into the vowels of *"A"*. They believe they are serving great powers: Stalin, Mussolini, Chogyam Trungpa, Muhammed X. They walk, like Baudelaire, Lorca, Reznikoff, invisibly through the city, watching and listening.

Writes Mina Loy: "To maintain my incognito the hazard I chose was—poet." In its obituary, *The New York Times* reported that Angleton's favorite poets were Eliot and Cummings.

—ELIOT WEINBERGER

Postscript

Shortly after this message was transmitted to Sulfur Central, a book-length study of Pearson, Angleton and the Yale spooks appeared. Robin W. Winks' *Cloak & Gown: Scholars in the Secret War, 1939-1961* (Wm. Morrow, 1987) is longwinded and unbearably clubby, but full of interesting information:

Angleton, while still an undergraduate, appears to have been an energetic *littérateur*. He had visited Pound in Rapallo, and shared his enthusiasm for Mussolini. He was chummy with Cummings, met Marianne Moore, lunched with Thomas Mann, brought the ambiguous William Empson to Yale. He helped James Agee with the manuscript of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*.

His relationship with Pearson was close: father-son, or master-disciple. While in London during the war, he traveled in the Pearson circle: Eliot, the Sitwells, Benjamin Britten, Graham Greene, E.M. Forster, Ralph

Vaughan Williams, Norman Douglas, Elizabeth Bowen, Compton Mackenzie. He was a frequent guest at H.D. and Bryher's flat.

The O.S.S. office was no less literary. Angleton had recruited two close friends: Edward Weismiller, the Yale Younger Poet of 1936, and Richard Ellmann, the future Joyce scholar. Fellow agents included (along with superspook William Casey) Donald Gallup, the Pound bibliographer, and Louis Martz, the Milton scholar who would later edit H.D.'s *Collected Poems*. His secretary was H.D.'s daughter Perdita. (H.D. seems to have been surrounded by spies. It is curious that Bryher was apparently the only outside person to know Pearson's code name.)

In 1975, on a tour of the Far East, Norman Holmes Pearson fell ill in Seoul and died soon after. Mrs. Pearson believed that he had been poisoned by North Koreans—proof that he was still working for the Company.

—E.W.

CLARKE ON THE FO'C'SLE; TO HIM, BURNS*

Any text is a manifesto, can make a poetics. A poem I just finished mentions a
river god in
textile with fat urns the source of /a/ river, just blue and offwhite
thread, not even sad that it dulls down, even rolled in acid-free paper
and stored at constant temperature. Fetished iron and thread are a Nail God
for us, the hours you spent reading unwasted. Pope
cared like you for states of things but caressed them, surfaces as such, your fourteen-liners so offhand shine here with that glow, odor of tea because
like Marianne Moore they pretend notes only are intended and this for courtesy
as much as scholarship. Primitive things should stay what they are.
"Power" in Blake isn't like what this company I set type for vends, physics and magic
distinct.
As I read, argument pouring down the page Tennysonianly picturesque
you might I suppose construct this plasticine-limbed figure taken as talking *among* such things or entities as Keats desiring fallen ones put himself on steps leading to them,
Vader or Conan images (again they can be called this because already made into images), the message-poem like any lecture or sword grip
like brooches in *Arthur's Britain* plates, thing for David Jones to thumb, thinking
about rats, this trouble argument has of assuming an audience
moderately well disposed to *Sorge*fuls. It's gone, John, the Norns with magnetic fish,
William Morris off to Iceland (Gloucester). Gerrit says there's a Black Mountain
Bard event you may be at, everyone planting stone spindles and churingas

* In response to John Clarke's *From Feathers to Iron*, Tombouctou/Convivio, Bolinas, 1987.

to be in journals, and don't you like (better than photos) ink renderings of flints,
stippled.
I was in Gloucester Sunday painting boats, blue, black, blue, green, blue—they had names but (like "Liberty" on a white one just a dot) not rendered, tiny bit of scrollwork to stand for theirs, red speck for bicycle-reflector "eye" on by good luck the green one, and calligraphy over kind of undulant (and diverse) sky blue to be reflected masts, hung nets, mass of boats—the backs notch in so so do the reflections—and it didn't matter that the wind shifted when I was nearly done and the boats turned more towards me, gulls on the roof painted in and painted out. Elizabeth Sewell (*The Structure of Poetry*) describes Mallarmé as this network of nonreferential nouns (wrapped as everybody knows aroun an absence) and there's just no reference there to reference of paint. My squiggles are Monets seen in the Jeu de Paume of boats in rivers and what I was looking at
equally.
And great single-figure calligraphs from karate-film *dojos*. Anything's a myth to me, the kid's silver whistle-rattle in Boston's Museum with clusters of bells. Chinese bronze harness bells, the rigid ones in a circle, could have inside, as clappers,
small bronze bells
you can peer at, shadowed from verdigris and narrowness of aperture, like anything in Currier & Ives. The world is almost intrinsically flotsam (if the box is big you live in it, if small a bookshelf). Carved boat hulls and harpoons tinted on the living board they're cut from say first this is decor, then ignore the board. The chips you see look like brushstrokes. In the boat these people in Sou'westers remind you (their job) of Ryder, Wyeth, complex of people who, spending themselves on rendering gave us—Dracula in the Wild West—personage and context complete. All this has been said before in Italian. Say I recognize your accent or saxophone playing in the tomb, knock on the side (no carved figures to describe) and you, rising, ask how Buffalo is. Neither you nor I is mythic but the saxophone probably is. Verse is *for* this soapy rendering, "buttery" as Permalba white says on the box, Apollo's robe in the tapestry like a Vermeer wall map.
Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* in the Chandos reprint (spotted in Abraxas) once you get past the foreedge marbling and spidery title page are a manifesto (what do you think of "manifestion"?) for a kind of art, or is it any at all you're afraid will go, Pope under squamous poetastrian deformers. . .potty silver creamers of the period can have, instead of gryphon feet, trim hooves, the effect startling as (really seen) those bells with bells inside, the balls inside *those* stone. I go eighteenth-century, think of Gosse's *Gray* in the same shop, "Elegy Wrote in a Country Church-Yard" for the tastes of scholars for whom study is a flavor.
To be a "thing" at all, Kant says, a thing has to be one of a series. There are no unique events. Any poem contains a poetics as (Aristotle) a resonant event its maxim. A bottlecap is a shield (a young man I talked to said you can flatten them and make a snake). Film projected through smoky lucite is demiurges, -urgos, and Apollo's name ends with n.
Regularity can be specified, Black Mountain Alums Convene at Bard. *Omphalos* is a long oval puddingstone rock from Don Quatrale's yard he stuck upright in a pot. Everything, absolutely everything is a herm and hence a poetics, if a poetics is what helps you think about something. The stories as you say, in their localia, recede even for peasant retailers, word in French. If the elephant blanket is embroidered with jewels, it doesn't matter at all that the elephant is silver. I'm leafing through Thomas's *Collected Poems*, dark-vowelled birds, heads in a cunning cloud, the last lines, "as long as forever is," fern's seeds on the sill, girl-encircled island. . . saint heron on kingfisher shore. We wear their sounds like plaid pins (found in graves till the Christians stopped burying them). Scotland had mirrors, and *images* of mirrors carved on rock, vestige if you like vestiges of an old religion, and we're

told by Ricks the Lady of Shalott used her mirror to see the good side
of her tapestry. This too is poetics, art meditating on the *fact* of image as established
by craft. Ashbery curved what curved before. Esher's spheroidal maunderings reflect
nothing, his lizards gollies. You before the mast (I suppose that big thing is a mast)
as Hart sinks bubbling behind and Olson's Figure of Outward does so, cut tin,
do wangle in with feathers so hard to make of iron (I've worked for people
who gilded leaves) and the duck we kept in the bathroom left tufts of down we still find
and the gold leaves in Franklin's static tester *could* be iron. You could amalgamate
a blue feather under glass in an iron brooch to wear with a plaid, down Derry down.
Inside the shadow under the lip of the Chinese bell you see, dim as a strict interior, this
sphere pierced with a grin as it were, slot for sound, through which the pebble that's its
clapper cleeks.

6.16.87

—GERALD BURNS

READING, SUMMER 1987

Anticipation is better than expectation &, as the Iran-Contra libretto fades away but before the task of finding the music for it begins, several new university press releases of theoretical entertainments—lake reading for those who've tired of the new novel—loom, like those rocks that you can hide your keys in. Derridamania (*live band every night*) has hit the University of Nebraska Press. *Wittgenstein and Derrida* by Henry Staten (182 pp.) is more an introduction to the Divine Mr. D than a study of the ever-incandescent Maestro W, & especially welcome in its efforts to place Derrida within a philosophical context (& so mute the odd but common idea that his work is literary theory ex nihilo). The volume is part of that great Polyuniversity Press "Great Conjunctions" series that has previously given us *Freud and Jolson* ("Mammy, how I love you"), *Buber and Niedecker: The Protestant Ethic and Yiddish Spiritualism, De Man and DeLady: Dysconstructing Deconstruction,* and the greatly anticipated *Ollie and the Ayatolla* ("It's my shredding party & I'll lie if I want to"). Meanwhile, Mr. D, now on location in Irvine & no doubt prepared to enter the southern California political fray, has issued his 1972 textual ~~master~~piece *Glas,* translated by John P. Leavey, Jr. & Richard Rand (262 two-column pages), while the same press has simultaneously published *Glassary,* an elaborate *320*-page guide to *Glas,* including an extensive index, by John P. Leavey, Jr., with essays by Gregory L. Ulmer & Derrida. Further north in the mainland, the University of Chicago Press has just published Alan Bass's

translation of Derrida's 1980 *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (522 pp.) ("1 August 1979. and then I slept for the whole afternoon [the television was on]. I feel a bit drunk, I am getting back to the typewriter looking at Socrates from the corner of my eye. I can see him carpeted in the image. . . .") Chicago has also just released George Lakoff's imposing volume *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (614 pp.)—an attempt to show *empirically,* through a systematic summary of dozens of linguistic, anthropological, & social psychology studies, what many of us have assumed on faith (*in practice*): that categories arise from "actual" human experiences shaped by biological & ideological & imaginative & mythopoetic predispositions & interactions & are not logically consistent abstractions; a *summa contra* linguistic objectivism & analytic philosophy insofar as they claim that language neutrally de-signates an independently definitive world of distinct "objects" (or object forms). Matchless on this point is Chicago's superbly produced *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, including the Demotic Spells,* edited by Hans Dieter Betz (340 pp.) ("[If you make] an offering of wheaten meal and ripe mulberries and unsoftened (?) sesame and uncooked *thrion* and throw into this a beet, you will gain control of your own shadow / so that it [will serve] you." "ABLANATHANALBA BLATHANABA NATHANDA ANATHANA NABANAEI ABTHOOTH BARBACHA ABRASAX"). This is one of the textually richest works published in years, complete with pages of spells that look like lettrist poems or sound-text scores, which in some ways they were. (The "papyri" are from Greco-Roman Egypt from the second century B.C. to the fifth century A.D.) Perhaps it's not all that great a leap to M.M. Bakhtin's *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays,* translated by Vern W. McGee, & edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (University of Texas Press, 177 pp.). Bakhtin discusses the multiplicity of primary speech genres as well as secondary (complex, primarily written) speech genres (literature, scientific research, commentary—he doesn't mention spells) in a way that brings to mind Goffman's sense of the "institutional" character of social interactions. Of related interest, Harvard University Press has published a paperback edition of the previously difficult-to-get *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* by V.N. Volosinov (presumably Bakhtin), translated by Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik (205 pp.). From the University of Minnesota Press (Theory and History of Literature Volume 31), Samuel Weber's *Institution and Interpretation* (183 pp.): "This very problem is addressed in the work of Charles Sanders Peirce who, although certainly an early forerunner of deconstruction, was from the very start concerned with the other side: the fact that despite the tendencies of semiotic processes to be open-ended and relatively indeterminate, determination takes place all the time, has always taken place, and will always take place, over and above the efforts of individual thinkers

. . . .This is why Peirce develops a notion of the 'real,' 'actual' or 'experience' not as a given state of affairs, but as a violent shock, involving conflict, struggle, and resistance. Reality and resistance recover their etymological kinship in Peirce. The problem then becomes that of defining the conditions under which such a violent arrestation—in other words: institution—takes place." Now here's James Clifford, introducing *Writing Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography,* edited by Clifford and George E. Marcus (University of California Press, 305 pp.): "The essays collected here. . .see culture as composed of seriously contested codes and representations; they assume that the poetic and the political are inseparable, that science is in, not above, historical and linguistic processes." Finally, having laid out these "new releases," it will be time to (re)read Luce Irigaray's (anti)essential *This Sex Which Is Not One,* translated by Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Cornell University Press, 224 pp.)—a radical consideration of the phallocratic logic of the "great" works of the West, with special emphasis on the masculinist myopias of Freud & Lacan: "In other words, the issue is not one of elaborating a new theory of which woman would be the *subject* or the *object,* but one of jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretension to the production of a truth and of a meaning that are excessively univocal. . . .This 'style' does not privilege sight; instead it takes each figure back to its source, which is among other things *tactile.* . . .Its 'style' resists and explodes every established form, figure, idea or concept. Which does not mean that it lacks style, as we might be led to believe by a discursivity that cannot conceive of it. But its 'style' cannot be upheld as a thesis, cannot be the object of a position."

—CHARLES BERNSTEIN

LANGUAGE POETRY, 1971-1986*

1)

In the 1975 mini-anthology which Ron Silliman edited for *Alcheringa,* the epigraph is from Charles Olson:

* *In the American Tree,* Ron Silliman, editor. National Poetry Foundation. 628 pages.
"Language Poetries": An Anthology, Douglas Messerli, editor. New Directions. 192 pages.

That which exists
through itself
is what is called meaning

Olson in turn is misquoting Richard Wilhelm's translation of *The Secret of the Golden Flower*: "Master Lü-tsu said, That which exists through itself is called the Way (Tao)."

The epigraph to the "Second Front," the selection of theoretical writings in *In the American Tree,* is an unacknowledged quotation from Charles Bernstein.

All writing
is a demonstration of method.

In its context, in Bernstein's "Writing and Method," the term "method" might well be assimilated to Olson's etymological play which associates *meta hodos* with the mythological Way or *Tao,* but, if the dictum is taken as prescription, the two statements are directly contradictory. That which exists through itself demonstrates only itself: it is relative neither to a *referent* nor to a method, device, category, frame, concept, paradigm, logic, grammar, structure, writer, reader, tradition, or history. These are all rather relative to it, which is *concretely* absolute. That which demonstrates method, however, is a mechanism of *something else,* most notably in our culture a Cartesian mind. Methodology is Descartes' word, and his prime language, algebra, it should be remembered, likewise is non-referential, an abstract calculus. In the poetry in these anthologies, non-referential languages of two kinds appear: one which constitutes a world through itself; the other which like algebra is an abstract structure which must be interpreted in relation to specific occasions.

These two stances toward writing locate a troubling theoretical confusion and rift in serious American poetry at this time. The function of poetry since the Seventeenth Century has been to restore the object from which consciousness is (presumably) separated to its ideal status. Thus, Donne and Milton stand at the head of the two traditions of poetry which have been recognized in this century by the official culture. The one insists upon impersonality and the restoration of the method to its product, the other upon the individual self and the restoration of the product to the particular. These are, of course, the familiar cultural forms, classicism and romanticism. To insist upon calling meaning that which exists through itself is to deny the separation of consciousness from its object, which proves to be most familiar. Olson's dictum represents a break with the western idealism as a whole, Bernstein's is a correction of its post-Cartesian implementation. Both take exception to the prevailing degenerate form of Romanticism and

are thus often confused with one another; otherwise, they are utterly distinct. At any rate, language poetry is now canonically presented. The primary documents are collected and handsomely published: Silliman's definitive and Messerli's popular anthologies, *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book,* edited by Charles Bernstein and Bruce Andrews, *Writing/Talks,* edited by Bob Perelman, and major collections of essays by Barrett Watten, Charles Bernstein, Steve McCaffery, and Ron Silliman. The movement lacks only an historian. Perhaps literary movements only remain vital so long as their internal contradictions remain obscure.

The terms, "Language Poetries" and "Language Realism" are so vague as to encourage mindless polemics, and discourse has degenerated almost exclusively to that level. One of the dangers of these anthologies is that, despite the air of defining a poetics, both editors balk at definitive statements. I think it might have been better to follow the prevailing convention of anthology-making, which ignores the aesthetic biases of the editors, and to present the work as *Contemporary American Poetry* or *Younger American Poets* (see, for example, the anthologies edited by Helen Vendler or Dave Smith and David Bottoms). In one sense, all significant poetry since World War II has been "language poetry." "The revolution of the *word,*" as Jerome Rothenberg reminds us in the title of an important anthology, is the inheritance from radical modernism. Williams' cry out of *Paterson*—"The language, the language"—has been clearly heard now by two generations of poets.

Despite the commitment of the language poets to poetic theory, these anthologies fail to provide a strong theoretical context.

Messerli at least offers a summary of the recurrent themes in *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* and *Poetics Journal:* foregrounding "language itself as the project [method?] of. . .writing," eschewing "myth-making and personalization," and understanding the writer-reader relationship as a collaborative effort. Generally speaking, he presents a less austere, less difficult, poetry than Silliman: "The emphasis here," he writes, "is not on aesthetic concerns as much as upon poems that challenge and energize our reading." He tends to feature poems which could almost be assimilated to relatively traditional poetics and, in discussing the lineage of language-poetry, he mentions Emily Dickinson, Thomas Campion, as well as Gertrude Stein and the Russian Formalists. The purpose of the anthology, it seems, is to bridge the gap between the language-poets and a more general poetry-reading public. In Messerli's presentation the "method" is as much readerly as writerly: "the demand that the reader function less as a sounding board than sound with the poet upon and inside the poem requires, in turn, a new kind of reading."

I react differently to this demand, encountering it here in a New Directions publication rather than in the raggedly-produced pages of

L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E magazine. Somehow it feels like school. Whose requirements are these? And what is the authority behind this demand? How is it fundamentally different from the authority of a typical poet-hero? These questions arise, I suspect, when an isolated literary community is exposed on the auction block of canonical literature and to the alienated institutions which broker it. The attraction of method is that it creates a context for writer and reader to stand in the place of commonality which is the stuff of a healthy literature. It establishes a synthetic intimacy by legislating the rules of a language which can bear a complex poetry. Messerli quotes Bruce Andrews: "Language work resembles a creation of a community, and of a world-view, by a once divided-but-now-fused Reader Writer." I'm reminded of Henry James's impassioned pleas for an understanding readership in his Prefaces to the New York Edition, but by comparison Messerli opens relatively few doors to the work he's introducing.

Silliman is even less committal in his introduction, and the substantial prose selections which he provides focus heavily on methodology in the narrow sense. Work by Michael Palmer, Michael Davidson, and James Sherry (his important "Limits of Grammar," for example) would have thickened the stew considerably. Some of Steve McCaffery's essays would have located Language Poetry in relation to continental theory (and generally the exclusion of the Canadian poets seems to me a flaw in both anthologies). I would have liked especially to have found something like Fanny Howe's "The Contemporary Logos" entered into the discussion. Her work emphasizes the tradition of language poetry which issues from Christianity, Neo-Platonism, and gnosticism: "Why I am here and not there, and why now, rather than then—the reasons that the mind could offer for the body's temporal position were echoes of some original plan on the part of the Logos." (It would not stretch the terms too grotesquely to say that the first poetics of language poetry is to be found in St. Augustine's essay on the Trinity.) Oddly, also, there is hardly a trace of the Marxism which has seemed to me and I believe to others a definitive character of language-poetry theory. We are given nothing from the symposium, "The Politics of the Referent," which was published in *Open Letter* in 1977 and reprinted in *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* in 1980, an essential document of the movement, nor does Silliman include any of his own important essays on poetry and politics ("The Political Economy of Poetry," for example), some of the few useful treatments of the issue by an American poet in the past forty years.

I do not have space to address the poetry in these two anthologies, nor can one generalize significantly about it. Together, the two volumes include over 600 pages of poetry by thirty-eight poets. As the most important gatherings of new poetry since the first Allen anthology, they

should be made the subject of a major symposium. I will propose some terms which would perhaps be generative for such an occasion.

2)

The confusion which must be addressed cannot be defined in a polemical atmosphere. The crucial distinctions must be made with a fine rhetorical brush. The question is not whether language is representational—it is assumed in either case that it is not—but whether the concreteness of language is structural or material.

In the West it has been consistently assumed that language is a code which is independent of its meaning. Socrates noticed that his fellow citizens were able to speak of "justice," "truth," "beauty," and other signs with no knowledge of their meaning, and in the classical view, language is understood as an uninterpreted calculus which obeys its own logic. The arrangement of signs and therefore the successful production of sentences is independent of meaning. The meaning of the sentences derives from a secondary set of signs which interpret the original code. In *Anti-Oedipus,* Deleuze and Guattari write: "No one has been able to pose the problem of language except to the extent that linguists and logicians have first eliminated meaning; and the greatest force of language was only discovered once a ***work*** was viewed as machine, producing certain effects, amenable to a certain use." In ancient and medieval thought, syllogistic and grammatical structures were interpreted rhetorically. In this century, the underlying forms are understood in terms of phonology (i.e. the logic of marks abstracted from sounds) and the interpretation is statistical. The history of western thought has been consistently in the direction of (1) perfecting and generalizing the underlying logic, and (2) the establishment of interpretations which are likewise necessary.

In the first project, we have had remarkable success; in the second we have had none. When we receive articulate information from others, we interpret it by rules which have this unfortunate character: interpretations reveal the content of the rules themselves, not the information. Since Nietzsche, methodology has been either reactive, theorizing and narrativizing its moment of crisis, or it has exhibited a will to dominate with relativistic flash and brilliance. We are tyrannized by a logic which eternally recurs. Art becomes the permanent register of the Nietzschean laughter and dance, the generation of endlessly attractive structures of undecidable meaning.

By the end of World War II, however, this excitement turned to desperation, and a more profound radicalism appeared, which rejects both the prevailing semantic ***and*** denies the primacy of the formal code. The problem of language was indeed posed by recognizing meaning as the

structure, not the product, of language. As early as 1953, Olson could write (in one of his most remarkable and still, as far as I can tell, largely unknown texts, "The Chiasma," in *Olson: The Journal of the Charles Olson Archives,* no. 10): "I am assuming any one of you is prepared to entertain the idea that we are already beyond rationalism, beyond Humanism, beyond realism." And by these terms he means precisely that we are prepared to go beyond writing as a demonstration of method: "Does any man discover what's in himself except by accident? Is not accident a word which smothers functions of life we ought now to be more scrupulous of." That is, the order of the world is not logical but factual. Olson says in a lecture somewhere, "This wall *has to* be here," not because of a prior logic but because it was *in fact* there. If I want a book from the shelves on the south wall of my study, I *have to* walk over; I have to walk on the blue and red carpet. This has to do with the *fact* of my location, not its logic. In an important book, *Symbols That Stand for Themselves,* Roy Wagner writes: ". . .the human phenomenon is a single, coherent idea, organized mentally, physically, and culturally around the form of perception that we call 'meaning.'"

We can say, then, there are at least three current dispositions toward language in poetry:

1. The poets of *Antaeus* and *APR* unwittingly invest in the Cartesian conception of language, and they are to be condemned because they practice their art whilst asleep. The soul of their belated humanism is mechanical. They honor the formal code and unquestioningly interpret it by a normative semantics. They produce not so much a poetry as a sociology.

2. The poets who write prose or "grammatical" poetry tend to honor the formal code but relativize the semantic. This is a radical move toward a Nietzschean nihilism, which honors only the logical forms of historical necessity. They draw attention back from meaning to the mechanisms of production. One line of development in Language Poetry is from a pluralistic encounter with possible semantic codes to an aesthetic interest in the formality of method as such.

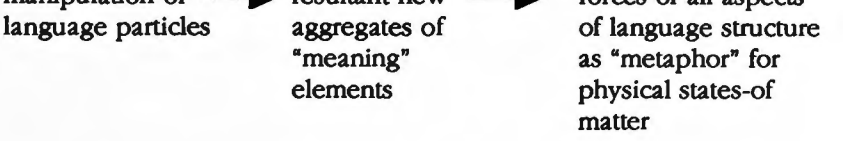
3. Other poets, who deny also the primacy of the formal code, insist upon the meaningful priority of the concrete world, including the physical world of scientific research, material production, and whatever gods, magical forces, and so forth. That is, language, including phonology, is relativized. Thus, linguistic rationalism is broken, and the physicality of language as measure of a concrete world is restored. We live in a cultural regime which features the proliferation of meaning and a loss of personal commitment to meaning. The spiritual crisis is not the loss of meaning but the loss of value. This problem is caused in part by the fact that value, which is a relation of a thing to itself, cannot be represented. It is, however,

possible to appropriate language on behalf of the individual and to manifest its integrity, though it cannot be described or explained. The profoundest poetics is concerned with measures which make manifest. "If a theme, a phrase, suddenly means something to you, you don't have to be able to explain it. Just *this* gesture has been made accessible to you." (Wittgenstein)

Although the institutions of poetry are still dominated by poets of the first type, who make sentimental references to a bygone culture, their poetry is not read, and, in a sense, it cannot be read because it is inscribed directly into history. It is the confusion of the other two possibilities which must concern us.

3)

The radical move which we inherit from modernism assumes that meaning (that which exists through itself) is prior to language (that which exists through its method). Clark Coolidge:


manipulation of language particles
resultant new aggregates of "meaning" elements
forces of all aspects of language structure as "metaphor" for physical states-of matter

In this formulation manipulable particles of language and their meanings are *prior to* structure. Language isn't a thing *it*self but things, unbounded by phonological system, usable, constituting a field of improvisatory action. The perception of meaning is as direct as visual or auditory sensation. Structure is mediated by meaning, and not the reverse. To speak of nonrepresentation does not mean there is nothing to see but that what you see *is* the thing. Melville: "By visible truth we mean the apprehension of the absolute condition of present things." In a variation on Melville's theme, David Bromige writes: "How I saw it—I stake my life on such assumptions—shows me the way." And Grenier: "Words don't have to say or be anything but what each is & does. A Word space." I do not know how to say this more emphatically: the structure of the world is not the logic of language but the use of language. The revelation of this factuality has been the central motive of the radical tradition in American writing since Melville, Whitman, and Dickinson. This, I take it, is behind Gertrude Stein's statement:

> Lord Grey remarked that when the generals before the war talked about the war they talked about it as a nineteenth-century war although to be fought with twentieth-century weapons. That is

> because war is a thing that decides how it is to be done when it is to be done. It is prepared and to that degree it is like all academies it is not a thing made by being made it is a thing prepared. Writing and painting and all that, for those who occupy themselves with it and don't make it as it is made.

Methodology, however, is a preparation for making, a technical or "academic" procedure, and not a making as it is made. When Watten appeals to "the predicative potential of method" (in the essay "Method and L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E"), he is proposing to fight a twenty-first century war with twentieth-century weapons. Methodology promises production but it produces only what is implicit in its rules. The sentence and the syllogism, which Silliman suggests as terms of measure and poetic movement, are sterile linguistic forms: the one an imposition of completeness and closure on thought, the other a non-productive linguistic exchange which mechanically transposes predicates. The poem itself becomes superfluous: it would be more economical and probably more entertaining to the audience to publish the method as a do it yourself kit. Poetry is reduced to workshop exercises (a fact which is unfortunately emphasized by the inclusion of Bernadette Mayer's St. Mark's Workshop syllabus).

As a measure of the distance between that which exists through itself and that which exists through method, compare Jackson Mac Low's use of the Zen doctrine of No-Mind and Barrett Watten's reference to controlling mind in his reading of Kit Robinson's poem which gives Silliman's anthology its title. Mac Low speaks of "the deepest layer of mind, below both the conscious ego and the psychoanalytic unconscious. It is impersonal, 'untainted' by ego." Watten, on the other hand, writes: "The transformation in Robinson's poem is not the coming into being of the image but of something deeper—the perception of mind in control of its language. Distance, rather than absorption, is the intended effect." That which exists through itself does not "control" or "intend;" it does not produce "effects."

To be sure, both Mac Low and Watten look, in Silliman's words, "at what a poem is actually made of—not images, not voice, not characters or plot, all of which appear on paper, or in one's mouth, only through the invocation of a specific medium, language itself." But what is Language *Itself,* apart simply from language? This myth of our symbolism appeared as a replacement for the strange—and after the bubble broke, embarrassing—gods we had fallen for in the 1960s. We have been tourists, hungering for experience, not just this or that experience but experience Itself. By generating a morbid intensity, we have been able, finally, to have an *experience of language,* language itself. The language of description, with its implicit logic, begins by describing the world, but the language too is

part of the world and must also describe itself and reveal its own methods; the world, however, is a part of language, and, so, in order to describe itself language must describe the world. It seems that there should be a logical prohibition of this infinite loop, but there is not. Language turns out to be the content of the world, not its structure. It is completely plastic; it is no longer possible to hold part of it back—as a method—to create a shape for the remainder.

4)

The work in these anthologies is presented in an aesthetic context. It is not located concretely in relation to either the earthly city or the heavenly city. The whole awful thing must be taken up again: what it is to be a person, the pain and joy of history, a most curious cosmos which is not demystified by use of tongue, lips, ears, pens, or the logics of these fine organs and efficient little machines. Susan Howe:

> age of earth and us all chattering
>
> a sentence or character
> suddenly
>
> steps out to seek for truth fails
> falls
>
> into a stream of ink Sequence
> trails off
>
> must go on.

—DON BYRD

"WHOWE": AN ESSAY ON WORK BY SUSAN HOWE

> A Drawing
>
> The meaning of this is entirely and best to say
> the mark, best to say it best to shown sudden

places, best to make bitter, best to make the length tall and nothing broader, anything between the half.

Gertrude Stein,
Tender Buttons

Susan Howe takes the experimentalist desire for interrogation of the mark and combines it with the populist mysteries of such oblique and marginalized materials as folk tales and early American autobiography, fusing these under the complex and resonant sign of Otherness. Her work with its minimalist elegance and economy of gesture is also charged with social density, in her critical allusions to our common culture (Swift, Yeats, Shakespeare), and in her austere judgments of the shared political and ethical destructions of our experience: the liquidation of Native Americans, of Jews in the Holocaust, the rack of Ireland. She has felt the inflection of victor by loser, of other by winner, and these subtle dialectics of power create her subtle political diction. Her words, sometimes broken even into a magical "zaum" tactic, draw upon lost or non-dominant languages (Gaelic, Native American languages): her poems are repositories of the language shards left in a battlefield over cultural power. Her palimpsests of etymology, her spells of misspelling float on a-syntactic canvases of silence. On the occasion of the appearance of her most recent book, *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time,* these meditations on some of Howe's works.[1]

From an interview: "Q: If you had to paint your writing, if you had one canvas on which to paint your writing, what might it look like?" Howe's answer: "Blank. It would be blank. It would be a white canvas. White."[2]

All of Howe's writing does spiritual and metaphysical work, yet without prophetic claims. For instance, Howe will produce a text which draws on the reading of deeply felt markings, signs seen under pressure, signs in the typological sense. With her interest in the anti-authoritarian mark, Howe's work can be seen as a fruitful juncture between H.D. and Oppen. That part of H.D. which derives most noticeably from *Tribute to Freud* rests upon the uncloseable reading of signs; the poetic practice sets down word, gesture, memory and dream, all glyphs for an infiniating practice of decoding. That part of Oppen which speaks of the lengthy preliminary work done to find one word creating the small space to "stand on;" the poetic practice makes islands of clarity or necessity like the Whitmanic "filament, filament" into the surrounding mystery. As in Oppen, Howe's work can show little interest in the connectedness of syntax, and more in the spaces of silence, the electricities of awe. The syntactic mode Howe favors, she names in the Awede book: "Paper anacoluthon and naked

chalk"—anacoluthon being a lack of grammatical sequence or coherence.[3] And her favorite genre (all told) is probably something like the ode, which lifts things to limitlessness, whose main debate is between overwhelming boundlessness (like the sea of death in Lawrence's "Ship of Death") (like the "more happy love, more happy, happy love" with the verbal excess in Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn") and some vulnerable boundary which may compromise ultimates of song, of bliss, of void. In Howe one feels the loft, the heft, the debate of the ode, the apostrophe of power and self-questioning, the persistent ground of "altierity, anonymity, darkness."[4]

An important, underutilized essay of Gertrude Stein argues implicitly that experimentalist writing occurs in opposition to "forensics." That loaded word is also the title of her essay; it alludes to discourses of dominance. Forensics (defined conventionally as public argumentation, formal debate, presentations of law courts) is understood as the dialect, ideolect, or rhetorical mode of a specific group which holds and practices power ("they made all walk"), social replication ("forensics is a taught paragraph") and definition.[5] For Stein, forensics is a system of normative definition, which, in the imposition of authoritative norms, trains one to patterns of assumptions (including those of gender). "Forensics establishes which is that they will rather than linger and so they establish." (p. 391) The writer of "Forensics," the *she* seems to be debating the value, if any, of forensics to her—forensics as disputation, as power, as definition, as "eloquence and reduction" (p. 386). Among other functions, this essay, therefore, is a debate between authority and the anti-authoritarian. It is clear enough that complicity, obedience, agreement, and renunciation of one's own bent are part of the system of forensics.[6] The question is "how to write" (to borrow the title of the whole book which this essay completes) when the writing space is colonized by forensics. How to gather authority without authoritarian power; how to indicate clarities without the limitation of certainties; how to give and receive pleasure without rhetorical or generic proscriptions; how to indicate one's volume without squatting hibernations of mass. *How to Write*. This, Gertrude Stein indicates, is her problem; this, Virginia Woolf indicates, is her problem; this, Marianne Moore indicates, is her problem; this, Susan Howe indicates, is her problem.

Howe bases her poetics on the evocation or proposition of "silence" or "a white canvas. White" as a trope for an anti-authoritarian practice. The foregrounding of otherness. The critique of centers, hierarchies, authorities. The suspicion of dominant meaning. The apprehension of power. And, often this has a gender valence. As in Howe's essay, "The Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson" in which Howe proposes a truth (specific, suffered, female) in opposition to Truth (official, a "masculine

covenant" [p. 116]). Indeed, Howe uses this important essay to locate gender differences in both the production and the consumption of a text. She analyzes the duplicity of the female text ("each time an errant perception skids loose, she controls her lapse") which can at once "confirm orthodoxy" and "subvert" (p. 117).

As someone situated on borders between allegiances, as someone who eschews what she perceives as untempered affiliations, Howe has had sometimes provocative relations to varieties of contemporary feminism. For instance, she is notably unimpressed by the discussion of Dickinson in Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*. (cf. MED) In the 1986 interview, Howe spells out explicitly the analytic and cultural danger she sees in reiterating a paradigm of the semi-conscious, mad woman artist: the end in breakdown, disability, death too easily acceptable as a script.[7] The Falon interview makes starkly clear what was at stake in this received paradigm (which *Madwoman* did not, of course, begin, and which, in my view it analyzed; but which, in Howe's view, it perpetuated). Howe speaks of her own fear of being an artist based on her apprehension that madness and breakdown were the retributive punishment for ambition. Tremendous psychic struggles are revealed in Howe's persistent linkage of "the bond between mad and made" (ASFT, p. [46]). The apparent insanity of other women artists blocked her from her own declarations; to struggle against such received interpretations of other women artists by analyses of their intellectual breadth was to struggle for one's own ambition and achievement, at once an act of cultural criticism and of personal necessity.

Fundamentally, Howe is mounting a critique of the tendency of *The Madwoman in the Attic* to a "victimization" hypothesis, which underplayed the agency of women. Yet despite this attack, Howe is notably feminist. Whowe? She is concerned with the unspoken stories, the unsung songs: "I wish I could tenderly lift from the dark side of history, voices that are anonymous, slighted—inarticulate."[8] She maintains the historical consciousness of the Creonesque politics of violence and self-justification; her response, quite similar to Woolf's: "Malice dominates the history of Power and Progress. History is the record of winners. Documents were written by the Masters. But fright is formed by what we see not by what they say."[9]

Howe maintains an uncompromising suspicion of power and a subversive response: wanting "to be known for having done subversive writing, subversive of powers and control and order."[10] Like the Woolfean paradoxes of women's writing articulated in *A Room of One's Own*, Howe's double perspectives offer the parallel analysis of a gendered writing beyond gender. A series of citations show the full arc of the paradox. "A poet is never just a woman or a man. Every poet is salted with fire." (MED, p. 7) "There's a *time* of poetry and a mystery about it that transcends chronological time and gender, and that / . . . / has its own time and its

own gender" (Falon interview). "Yet gender difference does affect our use of language, and we constantly confront issues of difference, distance and absence, when we write." (MED, p. 13)

Importantly, she is a feminist by virtue of her rage, including her rage at the misappropriation (as she sees it) of a woman writer— in the case of Gilbert and Gubar, by women; in the case of the mis-editing of Emily Dickinson, by men. The rage of Howe, the brilliant, lacerating indignation is a steely motive. In the 1986 interview, Howe speaks of being released to rage by virtue of an exemplary feminist text: the "tremendous effect" of the galvanic rage of Kate Millett's 1970 (1969) work *Sexual Politics*; Howe's reading of Millett led her to those changes in her paintings and environments (Howe was then a visual artist) which in turn quickly provoked her to a drastic almost interdicted change of medium—into words, into writing, into articulation of sound forms in time.

Howe appears to be on the cusp between two feminisms: the one analysing female difference, the other "feminine" difference. For the latter, she is close to Julia Kristeva, who evokes marginality, subversion, dissidence as anti-patriarchal motives beyond all limits. Anything marginalized by patriarchal order is, thus, "feminine;" the "feminine" position (which can be held by persons of both genders) is a privileged place from which to launch an anti-authoritarian struggle.[11] The female use of this "feminine" of marginality and the avant garde use of this "feminine" of marginality are mutually reinforcing in the work of some contemporary women: Lyn Hejinian, Kathleen Fraser, Gail Sher, Beverly Dahlen and Howe. This mixed allegiance will naturally call into question varieties of flat-footed feminism. Just as Woolf continually proposes political and cultural feminism and the critical position of homosexuality, yet satirically portrays monomanical reformers and colonizers of otherness (suffragists and lesbians among them), so Howe continually proposes at least a feminism of cultural critique while declaring strong opposition whenever she suspects unitary (undialectical, uncritical) feminist enthusiasm. The only danger is that Howe's precise kind of feminism may be misread by a- or anti-feminist commentators.

Certainly *The Liberties* cannot be misunderstood in its approach to the question of women's representation in culture. This major work from 1980 (published with, but unrelated to *The Defenestration of Prague*) begins with, and returns to the tie between Stella and Jon. Swift. Howe makes her own "liquidation"—payment of a debt, assessment of liabilities and assets—in analyzing Swift's "liquidation"—abolishing, metaphoric killing of Stella. Swift abolished things about his life-long companion, documents, artifacts, writings, for none of Stella's letters, few of her poems, and no portrait has survived. Stella is therefore taken by Howe as an absolute baseline of women's cultural condition: although she had a fairly bold life,

she has been historically obliterated, liquidated. Although Howe has mentioned that the title *The Liberties* alludes to a particular neighborhood in Dublin rich with cultural layers, one might easily hear an echo of Swift's elegant epitaph, translated from Latin by Yeats. "He served human liberty." Male liberties are preserved and eloquently assembled; female liberties though equally forceful are with greater difficulty disentangled from guilt, pain, loss, obliteration. Howe's work is written against the grain of such liquidation, to examine and assess a Stella, who, how: whowe.

What does one do when one feels the electric power of language from the feminist margins of cultural credibility? Resistance, refusal, austere respect commingled with lacerating grief, resistance to the already-said of literature (to Swift, to Yeats, to Shakespeare), a sounding of dominance with the mark lines that have dredged the margins. Stella and Cordelia from *King Lear* meet in the wild-woods of Howe's page space: a space devoted, consecrated to marginality, a page space that is a canvas of margins. Reading a book, they are examining what is inside the book, what is outside:

Howe has taken the responsibility of writing the book outside the book

piecing together their story, piecing together what they have in common, trying to answer Cordelia's question "Did we survive at all." They have in common their vulnerability to the definitions of others' stories. They have a consciousness of violence, done to them, or around them; violence to the vulnerable is a repeated motif in Howe's work, and within her text, often the quarry speaks. They recall phrases associated with their story (Cordelia meditates upon "speak again"), but these are cited only to be assessed. Re-cited they become different, voiced critically. They have in common a female relation to dominant story, muted and trying a voice, storied but claiming their telling. They investigate. They spy. They scry. They wait.

"Whowe." Sometimes they seem to be whole, but their integrated knowledge, unstable, alternates with explosive silences, blackouts staged by Howe. They panic. They are self-possessed. The dangerous dialectic of claiming *made* from *mad/e* is a brilliant dramatic and intellectually compelling site in this work. "Surely [says Beverly Dahlen] she cannot simply enter the tradition, identifying with is as if she were male; she is, I think, in grave risk to do so. But what other identity is there? Surely, to ask that is to bring us to the heart of the matter: woman as absence and the consequent risks involved in the invention of our own traditions."[12] A female writer. A female writer faced with a complex (the tradition) more often inimical than welcoming, and filled to brim, with multiplex inscriptions of women and the female and the feminine. A female writer looking for a way to write. How, indeed, to write. Whowe to write. The path Howe

chooses here, this examination of a fictional character, and a semi-fictionally available historically attested person, bridges a way to the definition of "our own traditions" to treat the palimpsested absence, filling it with our (with whower) annotations and firm marks. Yet they are already filled with what they establish; filled with taught paragraphs. Who we? Who? How? Who howe (who is any of us) to attempt this? And whooo-wee—the cheer, the enormous, outrageous pleasure, the pride, of making this attempt. The pride in Howe occurs not so much in overt exclamations of joy, but in gestures towards election.

I have taken my pun on Howe's name from herself, to point up the rich sense of self and of community (who we?) that must be sustained to sustain this kind of feminist critique.[13] The end of *The Liberties* sets a proof to oneself. It consists of a series of word squares alternating S and C (for Stella and Cordelia, but also to oneself: Susan, SEE!), followed by a series of riddles whose answer becomes How: a question, a salutation, a hold, a hole, a depression. Offering thereby an astonishing self-portrait of an artist, a woman, trying to inherit herself, to work herself into her own—"patrimony"? "matrimony"? "harmony"?

Hence a work of "howness: both concavity and depth" from a "howdie: a midwife, origin obscure" who gave it life from the concavity and the depth at once. "Across the Atlantic, I/ inherit myself." During the masque at the very end, a Sentry comes on stage to say "I am afraid," as who would not be, having written, seen, undertaken, dared and proposed such a work. A work which pursues Shakespeare (the drama like a mix of heath scene and Beckett), Swift, Yeats, and *must do so,* a compulsion (deference deranged, damaged, exploded by feminist questions, by whowe) undertaken in fear and desire ("dare // tangle").

To take such liberties. To take them at their word. To take their word. How to write. Whowe to write.

Left upon the stage at the end are versions of a community of seekers, versions of the whowe: a sojourner, a lonely bastard, and a fool. It is this kind of combination of marginals, fused into one, who becomes the center of *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time.* For that newest work can be read as an allegory of how the center, how major man—white, colonist, Protestant, male, minister, armed with God's word and courage and rectitude—how that man, entering almost accidentally some marginal space, goes from the straight and narrow to sheer errancy, sheer wanderings. Mr. Hope Atherton, militant new American, wanders on the margins of the colony at which he was a center. His oblique vision and experience of the Other (Indian) and himself as Other is forever defining. Following from Howe's study of the margins as marginal (in *The Liberties*), *Articula-*

tion of Sound Forms in Time offers a vision of the center as marginal, marginalized, prone to a hopeless—yet potentially saving—breakup of its most cherished paradigms.

This experience of otherness dissolves language. This new work again fervently enacts Howe's language strategies. The isolation of letter. Of syllable. Phrasal constructions. Word squares mingling Indian words and word parts with phonemes from "our" language ("amonoosuck" and "ythian"), these macronics making an "uncannunc" set of nonce formations. (ASFT, [p. 16]) Words are situational, meteoric, unrepeatable, impacting the whole history of language in one gesture. There is word "play"—the pun as the intersection of personal revelation (condensation, distortion) and linguistic possibility. And all these (words as if graffiti puns, macronics, words scattered like a handful of jacks) (words effaced; words without space, as in Roman inscriptions) the critical appropriation of all burlesque or archaic language habits for high critical ends. The taxing struggle to assemble and maintain a self-questioning (who? how?) cultural position: anti-authoritarian, yet authoritatively provoked by one's female identity: Howe. We. WHOWE.

NOTES

[1]The stunning Awede edition, in design choices a real complement to Howe's work, was published in 1987, designed and printed on letterpress by Brita Bergland. It is a book-work of stark beauty. Other of Howe's works to be discussed or mentioned are: "The Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson," *Temblor* 2 (1985): 113-121; "Women and Their Effect in the Distance," *Ironwood* 28 (Fall 1986): 58-91; *My Emily Dickinson* [MED], North Atlantic Books, 1985; *The Liberties* and *The Defenestration of Prague* in *The Defenestration of Prague*, Kulchur, 1983.

[2] The journalist Janet Falon, interviewing Howe, December 1986. This excellent, still unpublished interview, was done for a course I taught at Temple University.

[3] ASFT, unpaginated; I have assigned [p. 50] for this citation.

[4]The key phrase is cited from "Captivity and Restoration," p. 113. The summary of the ode is partially indebted to Mary Jacobus, "Apostrophe and Lyric Voice in *The Prelude*," in *Lyric Poetry—Beyond New Criticism*, ed. Hošek and Parker, Cornell University Press, 1985; Paul Fry, *The Poet's Calling in the English Ode*, Yale University Press, 1980; and Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*, Cornell University Press, 1981.

[5] Gertrude Stein, "Forensics" [1928?/1931?] in *How to Write* [1931], Dover Publications, Inc., 1975. Those two citations appear on pp. 385 and 386. Also of interest: "Forensics are a plan by which they will never pardon. They will call butter yellow. Which it is. He is. They will call birds attractive. Which they are. They are. They will also oblige girls to be women that is a round is a kind of hovering for instance." (p. 385) The overt social comment about gender may have a sexual discourse appended, since the word *butter* as used in *Tender Buttons* is a metaphor for transudate; indeed the title may involve the metonymic exchange button/butter, among other allusions and connections.

[6](cf.) the following: "I agreed to everything. This was not my business. And yet I am not puzzled. Because I was obedient. Now think of forensics." (p. 386)

[7]Of course this spirited position is one kind of feminist attitude; look at Adrienne Rich's eulogy for Anne Sexton which grimly says there shall be no more suicides, as if Rich—and this too is typical and interesting—could make this occur by sheer force of will.

[8] Howe, "Statement for the New Poetics Colloquium, Vancouver, 1985," *Jimmy and Lucy's House of 'K'*, "#5, November 1985, p. 17.

[9] Same statement, p. 15.

[10] Falon interview of Howe.

[11] For an elaboration of these points, see Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics*, Methuen, 1985. Despite the "feminine" being open to persons of both genders—still, there are persons who are held to be *women. Female.*

[12]Beverly Dahlen, "[Response to Rasula]," *HOW(ever)* 1, 4 (May 1984), p. 14. The "she" is not Howe but contains a generalized portrait of the struggle of the female cultural worker.

[13]The "whowe" of the title occurs in the "White Foolscap" section of *The Liberties*, p. 88.

—RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS

TONGUES OF ANGEL MAKE / FOR UNION WITH THE MAKE—*what to do with a book* / for *PARTS OF A WEDDING*—

It's what you would hope someone ***might*** do with the situation that your 'death' ***could*** bring them. They would love you. There love would 'drop' into the ground, & not be confused with "feeling."

I love the ***agency*** testified by these poems—it's 'public'—& the ***example*** (evidence/***exemplar***) given here of Alice's soul-formation—'***free for all' still*** apparently ("We the people") ***with*** such a mind/heart ('***hsing***')***from*** *love* & *death* & ***life alive***—to send forth 'rays' from 'beneath' life to speech & from there, to crawl down into the black & brown ground, ***as***necessary, to 'search'—or up to 'unite' in the 'heaven' (to which he may be gone—to ***anywhere*** in fact of which he) of the mind's eye of the Earth, as ***its*** 2 EYES ("floating in the Harbor")—one seeing "green-blue," the ***other*** ('opposite') (Life's 1 'partner') (on the DAY OF THE DEAD, e.g. in Malcolm

Lowry's *Under the Volcano,* or the flowers out from the Cut in Gloucester) "blue-green"—impossible, but true—how love comes out some place 'below' feeling (very much of/with sympathetically & theoretically inhabiting Charles Olson's "below-below") & comes forth as a human 'power' (the surviving Self converting its ***living body*** to ("Angel-Agate") "fetish" to invoke Him, to find Him '*missing*' AND '*everywhere*') that navels forth from Alice since—that beam up from Mother Earth/& death the ground 'always'—wouldn't you know it?—but '*more*'—the ability of dream & words & ("you") your "personal" conjure-capacity to *see* Him in the city streets & *inside buildings*—ALL PARTS OF YOUR ONE THOUGHT DO REACH TED!—to call forth & love & enact the one that you still know exists! knew existed! *and* was 'gone'!—*Even to be* ***there*** *too!—the red clay shining,* alive & wonderful—a hand-shake, two hands shake, four hands shake—I seldom remember what it *is* like to be *in the grip* of such a book as this, Alice—it's actual Mythology, *the* "St. Mark's Place," *the* task of writing.

—'is gone'—

—ROBERT GRENIER

NOTE

Alice Notley's 40 page book *Parts of a Wedding* is included in *O, An Anthology* which is devoted to writing and commentary as forms of series, sequence, non-sequence / extended works of poetry. *O,* is edited by Leslie Scalapino, published by O Books (distributed by Small Press Distribution, 1814 San Pablo Ave., Berkeley, CA 94702). Other poets included, in addition to Robert Grenier above, are Larry Eigner, Benjamin Hollander, Norma Cole, Jerry Ratch, Charles Bernstein, Aaron Shurin, Tom Raworth, Lyn Hejinian, Rick London, Lawrence Kearney, Alan Davies, Nathaniel Mackey, Michael Palmer, and Abigail Child.

SCRATCHING FROM STARTLES, FINISHED FINE

Two engravings by Albrecht Dürer, *Melencolia I* and *St. Jerome in his Study,* precede the words of Clark Coolidge's book,* and both are involved in the story that unfolds, or is unfolded in spite of itself, for the poem wants to be a spatial object, a rock, and as opaque. (When in 1917 Ezra Pound wrote to William Carlos Williams that "The thing that saves your work is *opacity,* and don't you forget it. Opacity is NOT an American quality. . ." that was true then, but by now (1987) native American instances of opacity have become more visible: I think of some work by Edward Taylor, J.G. Percival, Melville, B.P. Blood, Stein, Coolidge.)

Melancholy attends the process of this methodic poem because of the difficulty to make anything at all, to put it together, and then the doubt as to how it cleaves. Yet the composition of the poem is so achieved that one does not wish for more or less. Its size is right, fewer than 18 (unnumbered) pages, a poem of 10 sections, reminder of Pythagorean intellect. So the "wreckage" has overcome its own doubt: "Where to stem today, how to hook a night so it corrects the danglings."

> The light that leaks from composition alone.
> Scalded by a tentative. Expels the tiny expounds thing huge,
> Things made be. Any and it's large. A universe is not of use.

What is at heart is doubt, in arranging choosing choices, verbal repetitions, even algorithms that tend a barely hidden order, to melancholy such a situation conduces.

Doubt from start to scratch "of the matrix for his stir plain," starting point melancholy, expands to entertain all the availabilities of points from which the actions of impinging depend. Writing is impinging so, whatever, and reflection recursive on how impinging includes the world "outside" the writer scratches, on or from, conduces to these melancholy moods again. Too much or enough, too many names already things:

> The man on the tower somewhere along the climb has lost
> his name, somewhere among the other names for things. . .
>
> He has locked his throat, for he fears to add objects to
> the limitless. A man without words or a name in a spire of
> things.

* *Melencolia* (The Figures, 1987)

After the opening question, "For is what I have made be only salvage?" the first words of the last section, X, proclaim "That the stone is a false one." Then "The traveler in his blinded writing snarls. The thought said to move vast blocks will not itself move. Though the still block speeds the thought."

At the outset in Dürer's picture Melencolia broods, but in the actual mineral words of the poem how strange the continual female absence. Hence alchemy sputters and fails: "there is nothing to interiors but bouncing ash." "The rose is a jape of stone." Desire has not been invented; there is no volatile to fix, only "pressure on the pitches," a turning of fixities. The authority, Saturn, has consumed the differences.

> Adrift in an organ of something's lightless glare,
> doubt-dried, dreamless, locked in ponders his skull hammers.
> Along with all he has no name, and doubtless is to blame.

Though the Sublime of the Great Work is avoided or shunted, thanks to the melancholic doubts of old Saturn, yet the world is scratched, its startle is unthrottled, by the work of good words in order. Their play is right as the scale of their theatre or factory. Read us, they say, we are rarely and fairly compelling. We make a round a poem.

—GERRIT LANSING

MUNICIPAL HORMONE LOOPS*

The grid of the city is a control structure. Overcrowding precipitates higher hormonal activity in the individual. Self-assertion in aggressive public transit environments leads to stressful levels of adrenal hormones. The constant violation of individual physical privacy, the result of competition for placement in line-ups, leads to muscle armouring and protective, ultimately bent, postures. Excitedness and adrenalin are kinds of polis-binding links, a sort of biologically enforced patriotism, locking the citizen into the high population density urban matrix.

* one of a series of prose speculations on society, language, dreams, the neurochemistry of consciousness, and sensory prostheses, gathered together in *The Immaculate Perception* (Toronto: Anansi).

The function of police, of all sirened vehicles in fact, is to inject adrenalin into circulation, maintain the 'high' of background fear. The professional classes maintain this same high with news, an all-news station providing a constant low key andrenalin rush, like an intravenous drip. This elevated vigilance, inherent in the dilute aggressive state of the ordinary citydweller, is similar to the action of amphetamine. Security, which unlike health care is not universal, has become an industry which entrenches paranoia & isolation.

The city is a vast corporate hormonal loop. Mass levels of gonadotropins are manipulated by erotic advertising. Elevated levels of endorphins in jogging executives anaesthetize their social conscience. Unbridled smooth muscle aggression, along with elevated military spending levels, triggered the recession of the early '80s.

The mascot of the hormonal village is the psychopath, charming, witty, guiltless & deadly.

—CHRISTOPHER DEWDNEY

THE CATASTROPHE OF CHARM*

> Essentially an integrated circuit is a very complex silicon photograph . . . .But our silicon photograph doesn't just *represent* something—the pattern of light with which it was irradiated—it really, efficaciously, *does* what it is a photograph of. In a sense it is a miraculous picture, like that of Our Lady of Guadalupe or Czestochowa or the Shroud of Turin. It not only represents, but does; it is not just information, but reality; it is not just a piece of knowledge, but a piece of being; it is not just epistemology but ontology. [NC 208]

This passage from "Such Stuff as Dreams: Technology and the Future of the Imagination" is characteristic of Frederick Turner's notable attempt to cross-fertilize aesthetics with technology. This essay, along with "The Neural Lyre: Poetic Meter, The Brain, and Time," "Reading as Performance"

* Citations as follows: NC = *Natural Classicism: Essays on Literature and Science* by Frederick Turner (Paragon House, $18.95 cloth); FF = *Forget Foucault* by Jean Baudrillard (Semiotexte, $4.95 paper); GDC = *The Great Dimestore Centennial* by Don Byrd (Station Hill, $7.95 paper); R = *Give Em Enough Rope* by Bruce Andrews (Sun & Moon, $10.95 paper).

and four others are brought together in *Natural Classicism* to mount an argument for a recovery of the "deep lexicon and syntax of human artistic nature." [NC 28] Turner sees the transmission of cultural information as the central human genetic task; art is a "cosmogenetic activity" of making—by 'making up'—a world. "To put it aphoristically: we have a nature: that nature is cultural: that culture is classical." [NC 222] There is no "nature" which precedes culture: "All nature is second nature." [NC 215] Turner's is a deeply considered evolutionary perspective. He's a spokesman for a pan-human culture based on the biological restraints of the organism, yet he's also an enthusiast of microchip technologies as a further augmentation of the species.

This technological progressivism is unfortunately hobbled by Turner's theory of "kalogenetics," his term for value-creation unfolding through the ages in "a super-temporal conversation within the human community." [NC 162] I'm reminded of the "great conversation" paradigm of the Great Books program marketed after World War II—education on the installment plan as reactionary "self improvement." Turner's injunctions, too, suggest a kind of United Nations of aesthetic guidelines. He envisions a full return to melody in music, representation in art, and metrically strict oral recitative in poetry. Not that such hopes are unique to Turner, but he's convinced that these features are literally, genetically, the innate program of being human—that to tamper with them is a corollary of drug abuse damage to the central nervous system. What this ends up being, in practical terms, is a global rehabilitation of the old humanism, slightly retooled to modify its sexism and racism (anthropologist Victor Turner was this man's father, which is the only way I can account for his otherwise unexpected ethnographic liberalism).

Turner's program spreads concentrically by a series of equations. He insists on a clearly defined beginning, middle and end as constitutive of "the grammar of human art;" to violate this is to abort the "endorphin reward," to shun the natural opiate of the brain. Drawing on research suggesting a neurochemical similarity between trance states and the effect of poetic meter on the neocortex, Turner imposes this ecological dictum: consciousness *is* iambic pentameter. [NC 31] Holding "rhythmic repetition as a psychic technology" [NC 18] he hammers home his argument for the primacy of the oral tradition: "Thus at the heart of human artistic performance we find an archaic genetic armature of mammalian/primate ritual." [NC 11]

There's much in the imaginative vigor of Turner's book that brings to mind Olson's speculations in the "Chiasma" lectures, or ecologist Paul Shepard's ruminations on human culture as biological resonance in *The Tender Carnivore and the Sacred Game*. What's disarming about Turner is that he seems unable to recognize the actual aesthetic counterparts of the

new technological environment of the integrated circuit. He affirmatively croons that "We live once again in a world of runes and icons, efficacious and full of virtue; a world in which the distinction between how we know and what we know, statement and referent, meaning and object, has begun to break down." [NC 209] "The new electronic technology is by its nature playful, decentralizing, individualizing, and pluralist." [NC 210] Constantly chafing against his bogeys—"modernists" and "deconstructionists"—Turner simply misses the fact that these are the very forces that have been instrumental in breaking down the distinction between the what and how of knowing. So Turner castigates a mock-modernism, hellbent on a senseless exaltation of aleatory freedom, claiming that "the random is the most complete of tyrannies." [NC 223] Little does he realize that this is precisely what modernist poetics thought to respond to, as an historical condition given in the unprecedented barbarity of technologized war, postwar, and interwar. Claiming a pedigree for modernism which it never had, Turner's impulse is to clamp a lid on this cauldron of perceived moral poison: "The rules must be followed, or the freedom, the limitlessness, the generativeness, will not come about. And those rules include not only the grammar of language, but also the classical laws of harmony, melody, color, proportion, poetic meter, narrative, rhythm, and balance." [NC 222] It's depressing to ponder a claim that the human central nervous system is programmed, worldwide, to obey these laws.

Or are they rules? Turner's vocabulary is equivocal, and he misses out on a useful distinction made by Jean Baudrillard: "A rule can be perfectly arbitrary in its enunciation, but it is much more unbreakable than the 'law,' which can be transgressed. You can do anything with the law. With the rule, on the other hand, either you play or you don't play." [FF 92] Where Turner silently turns his rules into laws (and in universalizing them approaches a near Stalinist puritanism regarding what art should and should not be and do), Baudrillard sees that poetry's *rules* are of its own making, and that poetry is dangerous because it does have rules rather than laws (or judgments).

> Forms that are beyond judgment have a much greater power of fascination, but they are for that same reason terribly dangerous for any order whatsoever. They can no longer be controlled. At any given moment a category or a form stops representing itself, it no longer enters the stage of representation, it no longer functions according to its end . . .In the language of poetry we are familiar with those sequences in which things seem to take place without continuity, without consequence, without mediation. Language is always an order of seduction to the extent that it is a mutant order. If you suppose continuous,

progressive, linear order than it is still based on a mutational "superstructure." The words of a poem are of that order. They do not go through the meaning. One word calls forth another in a catastrophe of charm. [FF 93-94]

When Turner tentatively admits that "'Art' itself implies artifice, even wiles and charms" [NC 32] he's clearly unprepared to move ahead to a consideration of the "catastrophe of charm."

If Turner's a latent humanist, fashionably applying some cybernetics eyeliner and sociobiology rouge, Baudrillard's a theory-terrorist, exacting ransom from concepts taken hostage, fashioning a death's head no less imposing in its anamorphic freakishness than that anti-gravity cylindrical skull floating at the feet of Holbein's "Ambassadors." Rather than affirming a pan-human culture, Baudrillard recognizes that the museumification of the world makes us all "living specimens." Following Canetti, he sees that this condition effectively impounds history in the deepfreeze. "Without even being conscious of the change, we suddenly left reality behind. . . History isn't over, it is in a state of simulation, like a body that's kept in a state of hibernation." [FF 68]

Media is our term for the process by which selected packages of historical residue are thawed, microwave heated, and served. This cryogenic condition of suspended animation recycled through liquefaction leads to a continual spatter of data on the various windshields and screens of consciousness. This "ecstasy of communication" is mordantly depicted by Baudrillard as an obscenity in which "the imminent promiscuity of networks" discharges a "pornography of information and communication" through a helplessly enthralled humanoid residuum, glued to the screen, the *monitor*. (See "The Ecstasy of Communication" in *The Anti-Aesthetic,* edited by Hal Foster.) Too readily branded a nihilist, Baudrillard strikes me instead as a man singularly willing to speculate on every aspect of contemporary life as a condition of terrorism. The social demand that we all constitute ourselves as subjects, for instance, can be seen as a state-sponsored form of blackmail. Subjectivity is quality-control for (lifelong) hostages.

With Baudrillard's acerbic observations in mind, it's easier to recognize what a tremendously cheery naivete Turner brings to his assessment of contemporaneity: "Information is the means of production," writes Turner, "and there is now no way of plugging the leaking joints where the public can feed on the rich flow of free information." [NC 211] Such Bastille theories of cultural revolution are relentlessly exposed by Baudrillard, who plaintively laments that "none of our societies knows how to manage its mourning for the real." [*Simulations* p. 46] Invariably, as "We sacrificed culture for the chassis" [R 175], yowls of discontent were heard. But

mourning is a term that carries the weight of recuperation; and dealing with the consequences of the lapse of history, subjectivity, and other cumbersome species of representation is now a burden directly taken up by some few poets, here and there.

"Government has failed. No power is invested in the PUBLIC trust. All politics, therefore, is terrorism—the actions of individuals on behalf of private interests, in the name of the people. . ." [GDC 56] Baudrillard's lugubrious ruminations give way, here, to Don Byrd's "CALL FOR A GENERAL STRIKE" in *The Great Dimestore Centennial.*

> In the middle of the seventeenth century, human beings began to replicate themselves at an unprecedented rate. We may be running out of time and space. The world we have engineered—in order to accommodate the numbers—is a vast artifice, our truest work of art, and we inhabit it completely. It has no OUTSIDE. [GDC 56]

"Poetry cannot solve these problems," he adds, "but nothing LESS than poetry can solve them." [GDC 57] The catastrophe of charm that is poetry can not afford the pretense of contributing to those aesthetic strongholds where an evaluative hermeneutics desperately reigns in a toxic twilight. All this surplus information inflates us, bloats us, turns us into empty receptacles. A survival strategy begins with a gargantuan appetite: parsimonious sampling is no longer possible. "We are transistors." [GDC 89] In this vast epidermal covering of electrical transmission which we think of, archaically, as "communication," public affairs and the "public trust" are nothing but text, pure text.

> The text is cancer,
> and the architecture of feedback deletion
> unclear. [GDC 64]

—which is to say, homeostatic self-regulation is ontogenetically provided in living bodies. We sweat to relieve ourselves in the heat; but what is textual sweating? How much is enough? What is autopoiesis?

A work like Byrd's *Dimestore* is, in its self-diagnosis, "a work not of art, / an act of hygiene." [GDC 123] The microcircuitry scrubs itself. The text (invariably a micro-processor of other texts) reiterates a single, thaumaturgical question: "How long does it take for an information cancer / to pass through a population?" [GDC 152] The nature of the cancer is meanwhile unclear. Is consciousness eroded by it? Is the elimination of history one of its gambits? Is social life a media event, subjugated to the law of the instant replay? Is it the unprecedented scale of available information that we're stricken with, or is it the aleatory manner in which it spreads like gossip?

"The Truth is rumors / which pass through language / as weather passes through the sky. . ." [GDC 150]

Byrd's *Dimestore* is an unnervingly cyborgian production, in Donna Haraway's terms: "Biological organisms have become biotic systems, communications devices like others. There is no fundamental, ontological separation in our formal knowledge of machine and organism, of technical and organic." ["A Manifesto for Cyborgs," *Socialist Review* #80 (1985) p. 97] Behind all the switching operations there's a mammalian presence, both in the Ozark colloquialisms and in the cheap dimestore countertop regalia that litters the text: the "MASTER" and "SLAVE" pillows for instance. But this humanly fallible script clamors for a reader to intercede, rearrange sequences, insert new data, update hypotheses. Byrd's modular poetics are not indebted to aesthetics but to word-processing. One reads the poem in readiness to respond to cues like DELETE, FIND, BLOCK EDIT, RELOCATE and various other STRING COMMANDS. The book is nothing less than a manifesto for a new art, though its medium is inadequate to what it presages. It shouldn't be a book at all, but a floppy disk. Composed of seven "Books" patterned on the proverbial wonders of the world, Byrd's text is an information-ode ticking off in its titles the lapsed origin-stories of the age of the book: "The Book of the Garden," "The Book of the Father," "The Book of the Dead" (and "The Dead Don't Have Books"). Despite feedback loops and the computing power of Byrd's poem, it retains the puritan clawmarks of the Wonder Working Providence in coining *Whomans,* a deliriously poised provocation of man and woman, shuffled into a genetic interrogative, fossilized as a noun.

A useful complement to Byrd's *Dimestore* is Bruce Andrews' *Give Em Enough Rope*. While lacking Byrd's aphoristic clarities and willingness to provide a context, Andrews' poetry is more fully charged with its enraptured futurity. It's a book that instantaneously reduces most poetry to obsolescence, in its chillingly efficient demonstration of *implosion,* Baudrillard's term for the collapse of opposing categories within a differential system.* In Andrews' book the public is imploded in the private, while subjectivity is imploded in language. The six long poems appear to be a bricollage of linguistic spare parts; it's a "scripture hologram" [R 28], "cognitive dissonance figleaf" [R 29], "Heterophonic portamento" [R 49], the procedural motto of which is "Make noise, be seen, desultory info chameleon. . ." [R 144] "Treat me like a labor unit" the text—is it the poet?—says.

To readers gone soft on tv-dinner poetry (anchored firmly in pronoun, circling like a ferris-wheel around the subject/predicate axle, its cozy image-buckets dangling from different heights) Andrews' work will seem

* Taking his cue from McLuhan, Baudrillard maintains that the message is imploded in the medium, the medium in the real, and the concept of the social is imploded in the "silent majority" of the masses. See *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities.*

a piling up of soulless words, as cacophonous as Hopkins' sprung rhythm verses which Bridges feared to publish till the barbarous Moderns held the field. Andrews' polyethnic urbanized brawling style knows its enemies well: "Direct victim half the society, body is what you ('HEY baby') end up talking about all the present reduced to a showcase for the ego. . ." [R 168] Andrews does in fact deploy language in a state of undress, denuded of reference-as-reassurance, but reinvested with a potent referentiality as or in the vertigo of the phrase ("I don't know why you guys are talking about complete sentences" [R178]). Protosyntactic chunks like "Key hypnosis nipple leadership; mystery tout" [R 164] are the common denominator. Yet even this paratactic approach is assaulted in "Swaps Ego" where all words are capitalized, atomized, isolate:

Another Darkness Librarian Fluent Beau Pepper

Gargle Crow Omen Conundrum

Parataxis Burst

Pit No Factor Bleed Blending Fashion Ever

WORDS WASTE VARIETY [R 125]

Despite these distancing tactics, the sequential placement of words tends to bunch phrasal units together, proof of reading's gravity, left to right.

Language in the integrated circuit comes in sporadic bursts anyway, and Andrews' rich display jolts the recognition that the phrase *is* the new public unit of the cybernetic caucus. The texture of the writing in *Give Em Enough Rope* is clotted and sutured and in its vocal surges constitutes a *menstruation of information*. "While society / stutters in the prompter's box" [R 13]—"Narcissism is like not seeing that there can't be a private language if the body is a social—Guerrilla means everyone has the tools to do it, invent a dictionary. . ." [R 163] Person and personality stand revealed as a legion of spare parts: "Most Ambitious Self Hearing Lack Of Deep Someone" [R 103]. These are "the switching operations in which the subject gets lost" according to Baudrillard [FF 77], the sullen response of the masses to the extortionary social demand to *be* a subject—to get subjective (colloquially: *get down!*). "Can we implode in the real with charm? Without going all the way to suicide, we continually play on the process of disappearance in our relations to others. Not by making ourselves scarce, but by challenging the other to make us reappear." [FF 129]

If we take Andrews' poetry as a demonstration of the challenge to the

other to make us reappear, the final piece in *Rope* ("Confidence Trick") reconstitutes the pronoun *us* in the expanded headroom of a fervently political evocation:

> Equality demands no less; history begins with old man crying, logic you know, airplay your fingertips is not freedom—The disintegrating slop situation on outlaw; read it in the voodoo prospectus, keep trying death squads paid for by our *Christianity* radiation taxes to that human rights clone improves because there are so few rebels left to kill, like iron filings—Polkadot mentality you capsulize it with a commemorative stamp, slunk down in the heroic mode for comfort, Belfast, Capetown, compose loonee tunes that could be written in the mind by institutional simpletons [R 153]

There is no "workman's comp" for being a citizen in a technocracy, no public maintenance apparatus when "men have become the tools of their tools" as Thoreau put it. We're all integers in a data management system from which no text is immune, and in which our own bodies are nothing but text. The compelling case for poetry on the order of *The Great Dimestore Centennial* and *Give Em Enough Rope* is that such work unfolds in the unfathomable struggles of life today—and not a moment too soon. While most current writing obeys one simple law—"Stake thru heart kills most vampirish tendencies of audience" [R 50]—and is addressed to people for whom "history is a leaky ball-point, / fouling the pocket" [GDC 98]—Byrd and Andrews have elected a barbaric medium which registers the trauma of public life as its own somatic physique. Both are sometimes overlong, awkward, inaptly framed. But such are the risks of original work, work that reveals the mutant gasmask visage gradually defining the contours of the human face. No longer is this the invasion, but the *siege* of the body snatchers. Byrd and Andrews have responded on a scale adequate to the magnitude of the alarm, and their books are singular (if isolate) refutations of Oppen's disturbing forecast: "We will produce no sane man again."

—JED RASULA

ERODING WITNESS: NATHANIEL MACKEY
University of Illinois Press, 1985

While most of his contemporaries enjoy the poetic climate which sanctions a writing immersed in the disorders of its own medium, *Eroding Witness,* Nathaniel Mackey's first sizable collection of poetry, asserts the distinct work of a poet free from the dominant strategies of current avant-garde practice. As a result—perhaps also because it was published as part of the National Poetry Series over two years ago?—I suspect this book has slipped by readers whom it would otherwise interest.

You might expect this from a tame collection of single poems but *Eroding Witness* is spoken in both an immediate & sustained voice and the assembly bares Mackey's sensibility to the notion of a book as both a congruent and overlapping network. It is divided into four sections: the first and third of these are made up of individual pieces while the second and fourth are devoted to the serial poems, "Song of the Andoumboulou" and "Septet for the End of Time," which have the sort of body and pulse which recall Spicer's sense of the series as a poem of multidirectional continuity.

1. These are difficult poems but they are not adverse. Most often they are constructed of a private language mindful, for example, of Celan: an environment that is hermetic but far from hostile. Like the best writing, it defines its own enclosures and marks its own frontier: imagining the world's space each poem occupies. A world that contains, to begin with, a revised mythology.

Mackey's particular pantheon covers a mythical terrain including the denizen of the Egyptian Heliopolis, the sacred canon of Cuban santería, the Haitian loa-deity, Erzulie, and the cosmology of the Dogon sage, Ogo-temmêli, whose conversations with anthropologist Marcel Griaule are the axis around which more than several of the poems turn.

It is an enclosure which allows many voices in turn to participate in the poems as is immediately evident, for example, in "Black Snake Visitation," "Ghede Poem" and "The Shower of Secret Things: 3." Mackey assumes in "Ghede Poem" a mode that mythifies the self through the persona of the poem's title:

> Yes, they call me
> Ghede of the Many-Colored Cap, the
> Rising Sun. I make the hanged
> man
> supply his own rope, I gargle rum,
> the points of knives grow more
> and more sharp underneath your skin.

My name is
Ghede-Who-Gets-Under-Your-Skin, my medicinal dick
so erect it shines, the slow
cresting of the stars astride a bed
of unrest gives my foreskin the
sheen of a raven's wings,
the
untranslatable shouts of a previous church my
school of ointments, my attendants
keep a logbook of signs.

Mackey's epithets for Ghede and his use of paralleled repetitions broaden the poem without surrendering to gesture, achieving a powerful litany on "the edge / of love's disappearance" and whose outcast speech is prompted, in a Rilkean twist, by "the soiled asses of 'angels'" which anoint the poet's lips.

There is an absence which is inherent to any method that is fragmentary, and it is one which Mackey begins to assume with "The Shower of Secret Things: 3," a poem that teeters on the fringe of a near-fatal accident in Vietnam, the hallucinatory voices of that past, and a woman only in memory retraced. But if it is fragmented, it is because Mackey's drive is to shed the dressings of the exterior world to expose what Amiri Baraka in one of his essays on jazz has termed "the final sum of what we call being," that "internal and elemental volition." It is in this light, then, that the series "Song of the Andoumboulou" should be read.

2. In the liner notes to the album Les Dogon [Disques Ocora], a section of which prefaces the series, François Di Dio writes:

> The song of the Andoumboulou is addressed to the spirits. For this reason the initiates, crouching in a circle, sing it in a whisper in the deserted village, and only the howling of dogs and the wind disturb the silence of the night.

The first of these "Songs" begins as a dialogue with the dead by a people who in turn demand to be evidenced: an ancestry of souls whose names "get our throats,"—who ask that the meat of their bodies be ". . .*sounded. / Drummed.*" Who demand that the Word be their testimony. Which is a bridge across the distance between poet and source. It's a sort of metaphysic that deliberately lacks—like Coltrane's *Meditations*, for example—any corporeal gravity: as wild and exhaustive in its centripetal drive to find the Origin of the dialogue as in the urgent sense of Outward in its saying. An urgency that is the "brew of stems" which, as the poem affirms, "turns our insides out. . ."

The poem continues under the feminine rubric of the second and third Songs: Woman as source, as Other. The union of bodies as shipwreck:

Wet sand and water
wet our feet, all
shore dissolves,

as at our
bed's edge each
finger

works the ribs of

broken ships.

There is a transformation of the disfigured, whorish portrait of the woman in the second Song whose hands are "nubbed white remains" and whose sex is "a moist hole matted with hair" to the renewing, earthly body of Serquet in the third Song: lost Twin of our sexual selves—recovered only against all construct of the body. Or according to Dogon myth:

the Word the Nommo
put inside the fabric's
woven secret,

the Book wherein
the wet of kisses
keeps.

So that for a poet incapable of deciphering the language of the Feminine, of undoing the loincloth which "conceals / the woman's sacred parts," the She who is precisely that "internal volition" becomes the very mover of mouths to sing ". . .a / music. / / Unheard of."

The belief in the power of the natural elements as practiced by devotees of Cuban santería provides the backdrop for the fourth song, a poem which best demonstrates how much Mackey's language throughout the work undergoes a sort of restoration: both a salvaging and sanction of the wor(l)d's potential to indicate. Which—to borrow a myth at the core of *Eroding Witness*—is the cycle of Osiris completing itself: a resurrection of the dismantled and often meaningless flagstones of poetic discourse.

Divided into three parts, "Song of the Andoumboulou: 5" moves from a precautionary exchange between the womanly embodiment of imaginative thought, & from an underworld envisioned as a village of the dead to

the upwardly "light" of the "inward-reaching rites" of the Songs themselves: the poet as witness, the poems as proof. It's as if to say that the writing—like the ruins of Wagadu in the Soninke saga *Gassire's Lute*—testified to the inescapable process implicit in the book's title: the diaspora of what was once a former body politic. As if this were song that reestablishes a spiritual nation ". . .where the last / eye relinquishes / floods. . ." Which leads the poet to conclude that there are both "lamps, as ever, yet / to be lit."

"Andoumboulou: 6" and the last section of "Andoumboulou: 7" seem to intersect as part of Mackey's recently published full-length work, *Bedouin Hornbook*: the "Dear Angel of Dust" epistolary that readers of Mackey's magazine, *Hambone,* will be familiar with. Positioned here as part of the Songs, they offer an ideational and directional axis to the poetry.

Mackey gives no clear indication as to the closure of the Song series. Nevertheless the final "Andoumboulou: 7" is a reenstatement of the procreative parallel between God and shaman-poet. In the epigraph to the poem, Mackey quotes the following from John S. Mbiti's *African Religions and Philosophy*:

> The metaphor of the potter is commonly used to describe God's creative activity. Believing that God shapes children in the mother's womb, Banyarwanda women of a child-bearing age are careful to leave water ready, before they go to bed, so that God may use it to create children for them. It is known as "God's water."

And indeed the people for whom the poem speaks, according to Mackey, await re-birth: a waiting which prompts both poet and lover to also place a bowl of water beside their bed where they ". . .dance / upon the graves of the / yet-to-be-born." It's as if all the prior Songs formed only part of a momentum to arrive at birth's initiation rites. As if all the fragmentary absence ". . .unavoidably an inherence in the texture of things. . ." concluded in the "new light" of fecund sexual union. It's this dialectic between void and genesis which Mackey addresses as postscript to the last Song and as abstract to the series:

> I'm just trying to get it into both our heads that to unbend. . .is to misconceive or miscarry, to want to be done with any relational coherence, to want to abort. You can't continue to want the whole bleeding, flooding fact of it intact without a cut somewhere. "God's water" by itself won't do.

So that the entire length of this ambitious poem is reconciled to balance on the "frazzled edge"—as the poem ends—"of what remains 'unsung'."

3. *Eroding Witness* radiates in its third section with the numinous figures of the new music as was blazoned by artists Don Cherry, Pharoah Sanders, Coltrane. These are both configurations of the life & work and affirm a communication of the highest order—if even the impenetrability of such:

> no sheet of sound enshroud
> the Fount of this fevered
> Brook becoming one
> with God's Eye, not
> a one of these notes
>
> come near to the brunt
> of the inaudible
> note I've been reach-
> ing towards

["John Coltrane Arrived with An Egyptian Lady"]

Or as with "Poem for Don Cherry" and "Outer Egypt" where the unintelligible order of music is transformed into the Feminine who as the "insistent Mu" comes "out of trees [to] recall Osiris / back to life between / her lips."

Nevertheless, it's the masterful combination of a Coltranian monologue-solo as surrogate breath for the poet's own voice in "Ohnedaruth's Day Begun" that make this poem particularly stand out in my mind. Where the midmost, interior flight of improvisation is to ask:

> . . .what "climb" will Nut ask of
> me next? *ta'wil* to where?
> to what love
> turned into loss by my getting there
> as Night's reign whips on to where
> someday
> weaned of time's ghosted light we
> begin again, our Boat as was in
> the beginning,
> the sea itself?

As the goddess Nut's "tethered son," the florid wailing of both sax and syntax register an ascent from the "bright light of shipwreck," (Oppen's line which opens the poem.) As if even the most lucid performance were ". . .Beyond waking, walking / legless down where dreams unbottom our

sleep, / soaked ruins of a raft on which / the world outlived itself. . ."

4. Finally, it's the closing poems in "Septet for the End of Time" that animate a response to this "world / on the run if not yet on its / knees." They are a chronicle of the poet's sleepless cognizance to defy a vanishing sense of the world. It's this deficit, ["The broken rock inside me dangling / by a thread"] that negates—as in "The Sleeping Rocks"—even the plurality of voice:

> I refuse this "we,"
> the chorusing rocks' echoes,
> I refuse what of earth I'll remember
> most

It's this apparent hostility between a Kingdom Come and a fractured present tense that is the music of a "war camp quartet for the end of time / heard with ears whose time has yet to / begin. . ." ["Winged Abyss"] But even to begin again with the childlike perspective, say, of certain collages of Jess—to whom "The Phantom Light of All our Day" is dedicated—is not to be exempt from the visionary apocalypse according to Atum in *The Book of the Dead*

> You will live more than millions of years, an era of millions,
> But in the end I will destroy everything that I have created,
> The earth will become again part of the Primeval Ocean. . .

So that this familiar voice from childhood interrupts the seventh poem, "Falso Brilhante" in the wake of the "bittersweet kiss" of the mass murder and chemical warfare painted in the previous poem with: "*Better / not / to have been born . .*"

> The keepers of bread do with the world as they
> will,
> whose cards collapse. . .
> The way the
> wind has of having its way
> with a falling
> leaf

And though the "Septet" should end at the final vision depicted here, there is yet an eighth poem, "Dogon Eclipse," accounted for in a quote at the opening of the series, again from *Conversations with Ogotemmêli*

"Seven," said Ogotemmêli, "is the rank of the master of Speech; 1 + 7 =8. The eighth rank is that of Speech itself. Speech is separate from the one who teaches it, that is, the seventh ancestor; it is the eighth ancestor. The eighth ancestor is the foundation of the speech which all the other ancestors used and which the seventh taught."

Which is to say that the very testimonium of the poems themselves becomes the proposition to the ontological argument of the series. Which is a way for the "eroded 'I'" to once more embark on the "prophetic / ark of unrest. . ." of a world awaiting ruin, "said goodbye / to." The unraveling hereafter of which might possibly be attained not by an exterior restoration but by an internal one.

. . .To participate in a poetry that ultimately believes a way out *even exists* is the work, in short, of a technician of the sacred: the evidence to which is documented in *Eroding Witness*.

—ROBERTO TEJADA

THE NOISE OF TIME: THE PROSE OF OSIP MANDELSTAM
Ed. and trans. by Clarence Brown.
North Point Press, San Francisco, 1986. pp. 249.

Osip Mandelstam died almost fifty years ago, unknown to Western readers and a non-person in his own country. Since then his critical stock has gone way up but he remains the possession of a priestly class, Slavicists in universities, mainly American, and the odd practicing poet. Perhaps for this artful dodger that is just as well. "The arts that have escaped best," said Oscar Wilde, who knew what he was talking about, "are the arts in which the public takes no interest." Mandelstam's story suggests how the interest, though prurient, carries with it a superstitious regard. An early inmate of the concentration camp, the non-person feared for his life. His widow Nadezhda reports this in her memoirs, permanent books of our time (*Hope Against Hope,* 1970; *Hope Abandoned,* 1974). "Tell him to calm down," says a condescending warder. "We don't shoot people for making up poetry." In effect, though, that is what they did.

Mandelstam's prose, a prod or refreshment, led him back to poetry when his poetic well had gone dry. For five years, a "deaf-mute" time, he

wrote nothing he cared to save, then, in "Fourth Prose," resumed "the role of witness." This got inspiration going again and made possible the poems dated 1930 and later. But the prose, though enabling, is more than "an adjunct to the Muses' diadem" and asks to be read for its own sake. A lot of it survives, enough to fill a 700 page book (*Mandelstam: The Complete Critical Prose and Letters,* trans. Jane Gary Harris and Constance Link, Ann Arbor, Ardis, 1979). *The Noise of Time,* a portable volume worth owning and marking up, mines this rich lode and supplements it with other work. It has four of the five major pieces: the title essay, vignettes of St. Petersburg; a surrealistic novella, "The Egyptian Stamp," also autobiographical, though this isn't apparent on a first reading; "Journey to Armenia," unlike anything in Baedeker; and "Fourth Prose," a cry from the heart when Mandelstam must have known they were coming to get him.

Not collected here is his sending-up of bellettristic criticism, "Conversation About Dante." Aphoristic and implacably épater-le-bourgeois, i.e. anti-new Soviet man, this late essay pays homage to the poet as exile. "Fantastic homelessness" was Mandelstam's lot, and partly he is looking in the mirror. Pinpointing Dante's greatness, he says what poetry is and isn't. It isn't ideas, as when we fillet out the meaning or message. "For where there is amenability to paraphrase, there the sheets have never been rumpled, there poetry. . .has never spent the night." Mandelstam wrote this in a time when the Word was sacrosanct, not the Word Made Flesh but pronouncements on billboards.

Like certain other twentieth-century writers—"daedalian" Joyce or Montale under the Fascists—he presents the outsider. Between him and society a state of war exists, but the blame doesn't lie with the Communists, who have enough sins on their head. Mandelstam's quarrel with society transcends ideology, something ideologues don't understand. Essentially a man of honor, he was his brother's keeper. Cain the first murderer who rejected this role turns up often in Mandelstam's pages, minus the hangman's hands. A pillar of society, he chooses for acquaintance "people no more offensive than the croutons in his bouillon" or shuts the door in your face if you jeopardize his business, "untouched by any shame since 1881." Meanwhile Mandelstam, beset by fellow feeling, bearded the lion in his den. Clarence Brown's biography (1973) tells how he protested the death warrants drawn up by a henchman of "Iron Felix" Dzerzhinsky, Lenin's chief of secret police. He wasn't the stuff conventional heroes are made of—trips to the dentist reduced him to panic—and would have shunned this devoir gladly but couldn't.

Descended on his father's side from German-speakers on the Baltic, Mandelstam was born in Warsaw, January 15, 1891. He grew up in St. Petersburg, an elegant city dreamed by a westernizing Tsar, in Russia, not of it. Moscow, brick colored and watermelon-empty, stood for the real

Russia. Later, when Mandelstam became famous or notorious, Communist Party reviewers put an unerring finger on his apartness. One review is headed bitterly, "Shades of Old Petersburg." Where else would this stuck-up poet have come from?

His boyish sympathies were Marxist but not theoretical, part of the fellow feeling, and mostly his Socialism is a cry of pain. Picking up *Kapital* he threw it away, "the same," he said, "as Kraevich's *Physics.*" He didn't "hear" abstract concepts—too mellifluous, maybe, for a considering ear—and preferred the "true historical dissonance." At school, an agreeable hodgepodge, geography ("puffing away at a pipeful of 'Capstan' tobacco") turned into anecdotes about American trusts. Populating the visible world with Jacob's ladders, the young Marxist-with-a-difference sent small and large property holders up and down the rungs, "passing through the stages of capitalist economy." Marxism has more claim on our attention than this, but there seems a kind of temperament that can't cope with the Logos until it puts on flesh. This temperament is Mandelstam's, out of fashion with the doyens of thought in our time.

As a young man he traveled in Western Europe, studied at Heidelberg (Old French), then at St. Petersburg University. He was only a middling student and took no degrees, being about his father's business, not the leather merchant's, his father in heaven. This involved poetry, a disinterested activity that didn't help set the table. A first book, *Stone*, appeared in 1913, published at his own expense. By then the young *maître* was sporting side-whiskers à la Pushkin. He is clean-shaven, though, in a drawing made two years later, and looks like a haughtier and younger version of Whistler's Mother. In 1920 a would-be poet sought a verdict on his poems from this severe and passionate arbiter. "It was important to him that I cease writing poetry, and his words were a defense of poetry against me and those dozens and hundreds of young men and women who were busying themselves with the game of words." A harsh verdict and possibly appropriate to a young man, unselfconscious like the others he was raging against, it doesn't mean that poets ought to pull a long face. Only it argues total commitment, the kind that pitiless Christ enjoins on a sentimental disciple. Poetry was a game but played for mortal stakes. He called it a luxury, also vital, and sometimes bitter like their Russian bread.

Aggravating his outsider's role, the cosmopolitan poet was Jewish. In the beginning he shied from "the chaos of Judaism," but getting older flaunted "the honorable title of Jew," insisting on his inheritance from sheep breeders and patriarchs. His Jewish blood rebelled against the "gypsies" who plied the writing trade. He wasn't born from hucksters' loins. Just into his twenties, he had himself baptized a Christian. Some think this step expedient, a Jew escaping the heat, but if that is true it was out of the frying pan into the fire, and in a bad time for religions he took his personal brand

of Christianity to heart. The writing proclaims this, for example an essay of 1921: "The Christian—and every cultivated man is a Christian now—knows not a metaphysical hunger or a merely spiritual nourishment. For him, the word is also flesh, and simple bread is happiness and mystery."

Mandelstam's life is an alphabet of woes but his art is happy. In the years of his adulthood, morose bearded men browbeat their own in Russia, a murderous classroom damp with fear. Is not Lenin the spit and image of the schoolmaster type? Against the didactic men, Mandelstam's weapon is play. Forecasting the Bolsheviks, intellectuals in Russia took a dim view of this. With them "it was always Lent." Acquainted with shadows, he sought to disperse them, and in his writing, redressing the life, kept a perpetual Shrovetide. "Hooray for the living!" This cry (from "Journey to Armenia") echoes in his work. He said that Linnaeus, the eighteenth-century botanist and one of his heroes, "managed his task with dexterity and gaiety, like a barber shaving the Burgermeister, or a Dutch housewife grinding coffee on her lap in a fat coffee mill." A whimsical portrait, it gives his own likeness.

Chary of pronouncements, he ventured them sometimes. Soon after Russia entered the First War, he defined the goal of our two-thousand-year-old culture as a release into freedom. That sounded like the old millenarian rag and salvationists pricked up their ears. Then this Groucho, flicking his cigar ash, told them that freedom was all "for the sake of play." Making things worse, he traced it "to the miraculous mercy of Christianity." He had a knack for making enemies, not only the ideologues, pietists and patriots too.

Mandelstam's religion doesn't address itself to building heaven on earth and is remote from the world over yonder. Not a salvationist, much less an eschatologist (never today, always tomorrow), he lit no candles to the icons, sacred or secular, and peddled no doctrine. Or you can say that all his prose is fiercely doctrinal but the end is "spiritual joy." Dante, his model poet, has a passage that bears on this in the famous letter to his patron, Can Grande della Scala. The letter gives the poetics that form up the *Commedia,* written, Dante says, "not for the sake of speculative philosophy but for the sake of practical needs." Like Mandelstam, Dante is having his joke on the bearded men, and his practical business is "to remove those living in this life from a state of misery and to guide them to a state of happiness." The business isn't doable in blue books, however, but transacted in the livelier milieu of art. Mandelstam illustrates by referring readers to Manet and Monet, a temple of air, light, and glory.

Forward looking contemporaries wanted to knock down the temple and build a new city on its ruins. Allowing them their eleemosynary impulse, Mandelstam's widow says he was made a sacrifice to "the inverted humanism of the times." Humanism in the root sense means bettering the

lot of the many, and he felt the urgency of this. Generous men like him pulled the wool over their eyes, unbidden. Russia's new rulers, Madame Mandelstam thought, could have dispensed with prisons and capital punishment. "My desire is not to speak about myself," he assured them, "but to track down the age." All of a sudden, "I" was non grata, and he wrote darkly of some modern art "because it is a world in itself." Much pathos in this, telling of an ardent spirit for whom "Comrade" was a lovely name. Afraid that the Revolution might pass him by, he took his place with the others in the terrifying, patient line which creeps toward the yellow window of the box office. This was where they gave out tickets to the future.

But he knew that one of these days they would come to throw him out—out of the Society of the Last Word and the Circle for Grasshopper Music. He prayed that this might not happen but made sure it did. "Molecular" he was, breaking things down in the interest of truth, like the Flaubert he belittled and any writer worth his salt. His prose, though hardly egotistical, opens one man's window on the world. Poking his head out, he breathed "stolen air." Other metaphors of his signal the troublemaker. While around him the bitch pack "wrote," a mechanical activity like producing sounds from a phonograph needle, he alone worked "from the voice." "I am a Chinaman," he said, "no one understands me." What sort of pineapple was this, they wondered, forever dodging what he was supposed to do. He never quite figured out an answer to the question, knowing only that when the "tin subpoena" came, demanding that he cease his skulduggery and promise not to travel beyond certain specific limits, he would agree on the spot—but immediately start dodging all over again.

Supporting himself by literary hackwork, including translations, he negotiated the post-Revolutionary decade, still (in Akhmatova's phrase) "relatively vegetarian." 1928 saw a collected edition of his poems and prose. But enemies, baying this stag, accused him of plagiarizing in one of the translations. Remembering Dante, he said he was stopped "midway on the path of life. . .in the dense Soviet forest by bandits who called themselves my judges." Interrogations followed, increasingly sinister, and only the intervention of Nicolay Bukharin, a member of the Politburo, saved his neck. Regret is the fruit of pity, said one of the Mongol conquerors of Russia, and later Bukharin died in Stalin's Great Purge, the same year as Mandelstam.

A healthy child of sickness, "Fourth Prose" is his response to the bandits. Written in the winter of 1929, it remained unpublished until 1966 and has never been published in the Soviet Union. Mandelstam knew it wouldn't be published and knew this about much of his work. Once in Petersburg, he recited some new poems—sang them, said a dazzled member of the audience, "like a shaman seized by visions." (Brodsky, "singing" his poems, must be of the tribe of Mandelstam.) When could the audience expect to

see the poetry in print? "Not now, at least," he said. "A time of silence is coming." How can a man write if no one is reading him? He revolved this question, the most poignant of all for a writer, and thinking about the *Commedia* said that Dante meant it to be "the property of a time as yet unborn but already indebted."

His laconic title, "Fourth Prose," was a private shorthand, said Nadezhda Mandelstam. It designated his fourth piece of prose, "but there was also an association with the 'fourth estate' which so much preoccupied him, as well as with our 'Fourth Rome.'" The first three estates, coming down from feudal times, included the nobility, clergy, and commons. Writers, unacknowledged legislators, made up the fourth. Russia was the Third Rome, after Rome itself and Constantinople. "More resplendent than the sun," it laid down the law to all nations. "For two Romes have fallen," said a fifteenth-century monk of Pskov, "but the Third stands, and a Fourth shall never be." Mandelstam thought otherwise, and his entire career can be read as a vindication of the Fourth Rome, not yet established but waiting its time. "I want to live in the imperative of the future passive participle," he said, "in the 'what ought to be.'"

Reprieved from the bandits and sent to Armenia by his friend in power, he was supposed to write a perky travel piece on life in this Socialist republic. The result was a hymn to light against darkness, though just at present the light has been doused. His equivocal celebration ends with a prose poem that seems to glance at Stalin's tyranny. That was how the censor read it, and the magazine editor who ran "Journey to Armenia" found himself out of a job. After this, Mandelstam didn't get published.

In 1934 at a small gathering of friends, probably in Pasternak's apartment, he read an epigram on Stalin, "the Kremlin highlander" whose thick fingers were fat like worms. One of the friends whispered to the police and Mandelstam drew three years in exile. He had a brief respite after his release but they picked him up again, May 1, 1938. The charge was counter-revolutionary activity and the sentence five years. This time, making sure, they sent him to a "corrective labor camp" in the East, five thousand miles from Moscow. In his incarceration, "totally exhausted, terribly thin, almost unrecognizable," he verged on madness. His last letter is lucid, however. It reports his expectation of being "sent from this place" but adds: "I apparently got 'sifted out' and will have to get ready for the winter." He didn't make it through the winter and died, still in his forties, near Vladivostok, on or about December 27, 1938.

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This matter-of-fact ballasts his prose, all of it personal but at a remove from life. Like the poetry, the prose says one thing in terms of another.

Partly that is Aesopian cunning, a writer's refuge against the censor, but also modern-hermetic. Mandelstam, a good modern, doesn't care to put his cards on the table, not from timidity but fastidiousness. Profoundly an economist, he hated leftover things, and reading him you look in vain for guidons. This "snow leopard" who was one of a kind and lived in an unspeakable time and place is true to his artist-contemporaries across the European spectrum.

"The Egyptian Stamp," an improbable fiction, has for its setting St. Petersburg in the "Kerensky Summer" between the two revolutions of 1917. But the setting is out of Chirico, nightmarish vistas, and though this fiction allows itself a plot or rather two plots, linear it isn't. Parnok, a meager hero standing in for the author, tries to get the tailor to give him his clothes back. Also he tries and fails to prevent the lynching of a little man accused of stealing a watch. Hateful to the mob, this man is the thief of time and indifferent to "the mottoes of sundials." Two narratives, then, but they don't connect, and mostly Mandelstam's novella is discrete-seeming pictures flashing in uncertain sequence past the eye. This technique is like Eliot's (after Pound's blue pencilling), reducing *The Waste Land* to its essentials. The essentials look like shards, though.

Fragmenting the big picture, Mandelstam does the same with its component parts. A passage from "The Egyptian Stamp" suggests (in negative ways) what he is up to:

> The railroad has changed the whole course, the whole structure, the whole rhythm of our prose. It has delivered it over to the senseless muttering of the French *moujik* out of *Anna Karenina*. Railroad prose. . .is full of the coupler's tools, delirious particles, grappling-iron prepositions, and belongs rather among things submitted in legal evidence.

Meanly expository, this prose bores us to death (him anyway). Mandelstam's, resisting it, gets rid of the ligatures. Words like "indeed" and "moreover" don't sully his lips. Explaining be damned! and down with conjunctive adverbs. I write, he is telling us, Let the reader read.

A credentialed modern both as Symbolist and Acmeist (something like Futurist) and under whatever label, he paid his respects to "Mother Philology," in nothing placable. This makes him a highbrow writer, the only kind worth having, and uncongenial to "moujiks" in all countries. His mother's speech was Great Russian, his father's he called tongue-tied, that of an autodidact fighting his way out of the Talmudic wilderness. "Somewhere in the vicinity" Spinoza was breeding his spiders in a jar. From the confluence of these tongues, his own took its being. He has it "feeding" on its sources like an avid, living thing or "composing" itself like an artist. Most,

indifferent to language, leave their bones in the wilderness. Mandelstam, the wretched life notwithstanding, should be seen as a survivor, the man who came through.

His lingua franca, reflecting its mixed provenance, smells of books and study. This is the reverse of pedantic, i.e. inert, and the books, palpable and sentient, also dynamic, nourished his writing. Describing them, he imagined people, "chubby little butterballs," "soldiers in flying battalions." Not moribund but quick, books put him in possession of amazing energies. (One "lay like someone alive" in the narrow coffin of the age.) This made him a man to reckon with, and speaking for the subversive brotherhood of artists he said that a page of music—or, let us interpolate, a stanza of verse—was a revolution in an ancient German city. In a sense unsuspected by social engineers, his art is revolutionary. The change it heralds begins at home, though. Par excellence the cultivated man, he accommodated modern times, the Enlightenment, and the Middle Ages, and like a learned friend of his, felt the centuries as he felt the weather. ("What a nice century we're having!") This passionate hospitality mustn't be confused with belles lettres.

His early poetry is Symbolist, partly meaning inchoate, but by 1913 he was honoring the rose (for example) for its petals and smell, leaving aside the mystical penumbra. This is like Yeats, offloading the dreamy cargo that stuffs his first books and moving on in just these years to "The Green Helmet" (1910). But putting it that way is apt to sow confusion, the old one, not yet sorted out, between content and form. Worse than birdy babbling by the brook is no-speak where "content" is everything and the form, a loose-leaf binder, contains it. Mandelstam recognized his enemies (not all of them Communists) when he came upon them reading Pushkin in Esperanto. Now that was sinister!

Introducing an English translation of his poetry (1977), Madame Mandelstam recalls him saying "that the contents are squeezed from the form as water from a sponge." There speaks the modern hero. Emphasizing content, the message-mongers came up dry, a villain's just deserts. Anyway, as strong men know, the more potent, the more yielding, and "The signal waves of meaning vanish, having completed their work." What Mandelstam like best about the doughnut was the hole. For real work, he had a figure, Brussels lace. "The main thing in it is what holds the pattern up: air, punctures, truancy." In the Dante essay he estimated the role of the "music," by which we want to understand all those adventitious things that go under the name of style. "Not merely a guest invited to step indoors," it made "a full participant in the argument." Logically off the point, "it promotes the exchange of opinions, coordinates it, and encourages syllogistic digestion, stretches premises and compresses conclusions." Centripetal in their tendency, the comrades and their fellow travelers

(bankers, lawyers, and captains of erudition) wanted to come to the point. Like Dante, he could have told them that the point, if worth taking, was circumferential.

"What is to be done?" said Lenin (after Chernyshevsky), and labored his "contractual" answers. Never mind the vulgar misunderstanding: Mandelstam set his chisel to a harder stone. His subjects are the big ones: "Insomnia. Homer. Taut sails," less tractable, all of them, than Lenin's NEP. In "Journey to Armenia" he makes room for a Party hack who adorned the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers. A Party member first and only then a poet, he was "the strongman who lifts cardboard weights." The weights Mandelstam hoisted had more avoirdupois ("Stone" is a good generic title for him), and in the end they broke his back. Until then, however, he showed much physical prowess.

Poetry needed this prowess and began with going out on the roads. "In all seriousness," he canvased the question: "how many shoe soles, how many oxhide soles, how many sandals did Alighieri wear out during the course of his poetic work, wandering the goat paths of Italy." Mandelstam's prose is very much a poet's, that is, intensely masculine in its feeling for thingness. Words were like building blocks, each with its poise or heft, and this writer, deploying them, is like a master builder. Architecture was the demon that kept him company, and he looked for its rudiments in objects and the words that bodied them forth. Pinecones were Gothic and acorns hypocritical in their monastic caps. Illustrious men, his familiars, lend glamor to the prose, but humble men who work with their hands suggest him better. (Let it be said that writing is work for hands.) There was that old Sergeev who made the tall red bookcases in the zoology library. This carpenter could name the wood of already finished lumber, whether oak, ash, or pine, by rubbing his palm over it, eyes closed.

Sometimes a macaroni (but only spoilsports will mind), Mandelstam liked words for their own sake and liked shoving them around until they made a composition. In Armenia, his ideal country where everyone was his own philologist, they jangled the keys of language even when there weren't any treasures to unlock. His prose that calls attention to itself does this too. Often, cocking an ear, it listens for echoes, and his translator notices how the second word in a sequence is apt to be the "phonic shadow" of the first. Words were potent like spells, their quality not exhausted in dictionary meanings. Reading Symbolist poetry involved him in a thicket of *shch* sounds. Unlike concepts, they came through to the ear.

Before time was, concepts deferred to "apprehensions" (what you apprehend, you take hold of, the point to a prehensile thumb), and all the meanings implicit in seeing, hearing, and understanding coalesced in one semantic bundle. By and by they teased the concept "head" out of their foggy bundle of meanings. "Its symbol became. . .deafness." His function

was to cure this in prose that is good for what ails us. "A plant is a sound," if only we listened, "an event, a happening, an arrow, and not a boring, bearded development."

"Bearded" brings up Father Marx, famous for materialism but essentially a prince of abstracters. The Mandelstam who couldn't read him wasn't anti-intellectual, only hostile to intellectualizing, and meant to reclaim words on their physical side, coming up from the viscera and making a hymn in the throat. His self-conscious prose is partly a manifesto, defending the flesh against abstraction and the void. Like Wallace Stevens, another dandy of language, he thought the greatest poverty was to live in a non-physical world.

Often incongruous, his figures of speech align him with other salvage workers in the modern period. (Montale is one, an adept of ugliness who thinks that if you want to resuscitate beauty, you will want to know first what it isn't.) Like all good "new" writers, fed up with the proximate past, Mandelstam makes identities of opposites-by-convention, detecting resemblances we hadn't noticed before. Here are some samples, culled at random from the prose: sprouting bayonets like ears of corn, the schoolgirl shyness of apple trees, public telephones as terrifying as the pincers of a crawfish, the raspberry globes of pharmacies, linden trees frightful in their governmental thickness, blue policemanly phizzes of giant trout preserved in alcohol. Concreteness drags this prose earthwards, and readers who like their truth conceptual, "pinnacled dim in the intense inane," will close the book. For such, generalization is always waiting at the door.

The trout that suggest policemen come up again, and unexpectedly a Petersburger, attending a concert, is like them. This "feverish little trout" makes his way to "the marble icehole of the vestibule." Mandelstam's figures don't lack for decorum, and against the frenzy of the crowd is the "Alpine cold" of the performance. In his lavish expense of tropes, teaching or "kinetics" aren't uppermost, though, as when the writer wants to clarify or move you from A to B. This is what metaphors are understood to do. But wouldn't you know it, "a metaphor can only be defined metaphorically." Devoted to appearances like all civilized men, Mandelstam does his best to clarify the thing itself (not the same as the *ding an sich*). But though his presented things have their analogies they suggest other things, not a concept. In an early essay, "Morning of Acmeism," he offers an equation plus an observation: "A = A: what a magnificent theme for poetry!"

Lapsing in particulars, he isn't willful, and his tautologies, if that is what they are, enact a temperamental bias. His "little book" (he means "Journey to Armenia" but any of the titles will do) "tells that the eye is an instrument of thought." A taxonomer like Linnaeus painting outlandish monkeys, he prefers being to thinking about it. The images that enliven his prose invite

classification and his translator, disposing them, says how some import life, others death. But import takes a back seat to an animizing imagination, generous like God's on the morning of Creation. Perhaps Mandelstam's is generous to a fault.

Always acute but in last things non-judgmental, his essays and fictions confess an artist's impulse to bestow the gift of life. (That is the nub of the totalitarian's quarrel with the artist.) At his animizing touch, even the non-human comes to attention. There is the epileptic engine he hears in Armenia. Warmed by mechanics, it mutters a tongue-twister, "Not Peter not Helena," as if reporting to Comrade K., former chairman of the Central Executive Committee. The "as if" construction seems loaded with menace but this comrade is no villain, and boredom has planted fat kisses on his cheeks. That the cheeks are ruddy seems worth noting.

A provincial writer, Mandelstam gets plenty of satisfaction from his lower-case world, "the whole massif of Petersburg," including one small grocery store. The provincialism limits him, though, and he doesn't remove his "argument" to a higher plane. This kind of sensibility is content when "there" turns out to be "here" (Wallace Stevens' formulation in his little poem, "Crude Foyer"). But "there" is where the conceptualizers hope to take us. Prose that won't let them do that, Mandelstam's prose, makes a political statement.

Remembering, a conscious act performed in and against a deracinating time, is part of this statement, and though some call it ossifying he knew it for a "phenomenon of growth." Plough the past under and start again from scratch, they said. Down among the dead men, he foiled them. When very young, he went with his mother to view the embalmed body of the Italian ambassador, dead in the capital and lying in state. He remembered the chocolate building, the black velvet drapings, smell of resin and incense, a glint of silver and tropical plants. "What had all that to do with me?" The impressions lingered, however, cherished, he said, "to this day."

Childhood meant smells, the "sweetish Jewish smell" that swaddled him in his grandparents' house in German Riga, different from the smell of Aryan houses, or the penetrating smell of tanned leather, evoking his father and identified by the grown man as the smell of the yoke of labor. Things past "tickled his nostrils like a shipment of fresh Kyakhta teas." (If readers think of Proust, another great conservator, that doesn't come amiss.) A house was a full cup, brimful of pastness, and on the walls he hung the "masks" of other men's voices. These dead men, still quick, were his docents.

Dwelling in memory and invigorated by this, he threatened the brand-new men who thought history was beginning tomorrow. To remember was to make your way alone back up the dried riverbed. Oddly, that was how you arrived in the present. "Who were your people?" asks one of the damned in Dante's *Inferno*. This question reverberates in Mandelstam's

prose. Unlike Tolstoy, he didn't ransack the family archives but he wanted to know where he came from, an index of where he might go. It wasn't genealogy, a morbid study, that engaged him but continuity, the antonym of chaos.

For all the "melee" of pastness, Petersburg was responsible, most of all for her poor son. "You, Petersburg," he said, "will answer!" Receiving back the streets and squares of the city in the form of galley proofs, he "composed" the prospects, heightening and toning down at need. Melee no more, his city made an order, not sclerotic like the new order but organic like a work of art. In a time of the breaking of nations, this was a writer's job.

As "The Egyptian Stamp" begins, a cold white flame has been licking for thirty years at the backs of mirrors. "Nothing is left." But he was the keeper of the muniments room and survival depended on him. Outside, the spectators implored him to jump but he couldn't tear himself away from his "dear Egypt of objects," so, risking the fire, saved the past for the future. Montale, acquisitive and tentacular, does this too. Yeats also, who made his peace with learned Italian things, and Eliot, shoring fragments against his ruin.

Imitating the past, Fascists in Rome and Communists in Moscow announced death in life. Stalin Gothic is to Gothic as iron pyrite to gold. Mandelstam, descriminating, entered his lively protest in time capsules, buried deep. Sometimes, going underground or going into the wilderness, he disappeared for weeks on end "in the latifundia of his exemplary world." Call this world "Armenia," the secret place, long desired, where he lived in the mind. Of this mythical Armenia he wouldn't stop dreaming, not couldn't but wouldn't, a defiant act of will. There, if luck held, he might put off his "hooflike" shoes, the mark of the beast they were hunting. Escaping pursuit, the salamander had this luck. It took color from the sand or the paper in the terrarium. But Man, "the thinking salamander," though he could guess tomorrow's weather couldn't choose his own coloration.

In the real Armenia, savoring it all, Mandelstam journeyed back and forth across the country. One night he lay in Ashtarak, in the village hotel. Kulaks, dispossessed men and women, used to live in the hotel, in other times a private dwelling. Outside his bedroom, the orchard was a dancing class for trees. "Look at their quadrilles." But the day turned stormy. Rain, drenching the mountains, fell in the town. His senses aroused, he listened to the water running in the gutters and ringing and welling up "on all the stories and stands of Ashtarak." This allowed the camel to pass through the eye of the needle.

—RUSSELL FRASER

A NOTE ON *MONTEMORA*, AMERICA & THE WORLD

In Jed Rasula's excellent essay on Robert Bly in *Sulfur 19*, I was surprised to see mention of *Montemora*, a magazine I edited from 1975 to 1982. But I'm afraid I find his characterization partially misleading.

First, I shudder to think that *Montemora* was the "only comparable effort" in the 1970s to Bly's *The Sixties*. I have never had any interest in any of Bly's countless productions. [He is probably our Longfellow—a sentimentalist poet, an enthusiast for Northern Europe and the American wilderness, a bad translator from many languages—though I doubt he ever wrote a line as memorable as "By the shores of Gitchy-Goomee."] For me, the "models" among the regularly published magazines of the 1960s were *Caterpillar*, above all; *Kulchur*, whose critical essays were far nastier, wittier and on-target than anything in *The Sixties*; and that great Representative Work, *Poetry* under the editorship of Henry Rago, which was everything a magazine like *APR* should be. (Not to mention the scores of lively short-lived magazines; a flowering that hasn't been seen since.)

Second, it is simply untrue that *Montemora* had "a minimal involvement with domestic poetry." Though such nationalistic distinctions make me queasy, I would guess that two-thirds of the magazine was devoted to writing by or about fellow Americans.

Montemora was basically a repertory company with occasional guest appearances. The cast included George and Mary Oppen, Reznikoff, Rakosi, Bronk, Sobin, Duncan, DuPlessis, Rothenberg, Eshleman, Lessing, Tarn, Corman, Kleinzahler, S. Howe, Baraka, Enslin, Kirschen, Greene, R. Waldrop, among others. Some of these, surprisingly, were not being published elsewhere at the time; others were appearing in print for the first time. There were also extensive selections of unpublished material by the dead masters (Loy, Niedecker, Zukofsky, Pound, H.D.). Poets who, for whatever reason, were not contributors, were discussed in critical articles (Antin, Eigner, R. Johnson, Palmer, Rexroth, Mac Low, Dorn, et al.). And the magazine published seven books that were sent free to subscribers, all of them by gringos and five of them first books (DuPlessis, Lessing, two by Sobin, Mary Oppen, Kirschen, Susan Howe). As a map of American poetry, I now regret certain omissions, but not the general topography.

Of course there was a great deal of, um, *foreign* poetry. The repertory company included a half-dozen interesting British poets who haven't appeared on these shores since; the Chinese and Japanese translators Burton Watson, Hiroaki Sato, A.C. Graham and Jonathan Chaves; classical French translators Jonathan Griffin and Paul Auster; Jabès, Bunting, MacDiarmid, Roy Fisher, Paz, Césaire, Turnbull, Montale, Huidobro, Jaccottet, Blanchot, and on & on. The idea was a single perspective drawing from a variety of

sources, regardless of original language. Curiously, *Montemora* is remembered—if at all—as a translation magazine.

Since 1960 there have been only three such international magazines: *Caterpillar, Alcheringa,* and *Montemora.* They died in 1973, 1977, and 1982, respectively. That nothing has replaced them is the result of a disturbing development: translation is no longer an activity practiced by poets, particularly those of the (more or less) "avant-garde."

The two golden ages of English-language poetry (roughly 1550 to 1650 and 1910 to when? 1970?) were not coincidentally eras of intense translating. Consider, in the latter period, the amazing range of poets who published at least one book-length translation: Pound, Williams, H.D., Yeats, Eliot, Moore, Auden, Spender, Rexroth, Aldington, L. Hughes, MacDiarmid, Zukofsky, Lowell, Schwartz, Jarrell, E. Bishop, MacNeice, Day Lewis, Campbell, Rukeyser, Gregory, Bynner, Spicer, Merton, Blackburn, Dorn, Eshleman, Tarn, Rothenberg, Snyder, Ashbery, Corman, Tomlinson, Levertov, Hollo, Logue, Middleton, Merwin, Bly, Strand, Griffin, J. Wright, Harwood, Padgett, Roditi, Simic, Gascoyne, Barnard, Schwerner, Economou, Reynolds, Turnbull, Wilbur, T. Hughes. . .

And those who translated occasionally: Reznikoff, Stevens, Bunting, Tate, Empson, Cummings, Crane, Cunard, J.P. Bishop, Housman, Raine, Masefield, Millay, Hardy, Watkins, Ginsberg, Duncan, Antin, Kelly, Kunitz, Hollander, Hall, Ferlinghetti, Ignatow, Cunningham, Sorrentino, Laughlin . . .

And the novelists or prose writers who translated poetry: Nabokov, Dos Passos, Fitzgerald, Ford, Boyle, Joyce, Beckett, Kipling, Santayana, Josephson, Cowley, Chesterton, K.A. Porter, Davenport, Waldo Frank, P. Bowles. . .

In fact, the difficult list to make is those who never translated: Loy, Niedecker, Oppen, O'Hara (?), Stein (?), D. Thomas, D. Jones (?), Olson (?), Bronk, Baraka, Creeley, McClure, R. Fisher. . .

Then take a look at the Ron Silliman anthology, *In the American Tree,* which serves as a handy roster of the contemporary avant-garde, both for the 44 poets included and—a far more interesting group—the 80 excluded poets of "comparable worth" listed in the preface. Of those 124—excluding Lydia Davis, a prose writer who translates prose—only one, Rosmarie Waldrop, translates on a regular basis. Only a few others have done some occasional translations. What has happened?

It's my belief that, in the 1980s, Reaganism has infected every particle of life in this country, not excluding the life and work of poets, no matter how much they may hold him in contempt. As such, the Silliman anthology is an expression of Reagan America much as Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry* (1960) was, in many ways, an expression of Eisenhower America. In an era of rampant nationalism and xenophobia (whose

examples I need hardly enumerate) we have an anthology of new writing so nationalistic and so xenophobic that it salutes America in its title, divides its poets more or less along state lines, and deliberately excludes some excellent poets who had the misfortune to be born a few miles north of the border. Nor is the Silliman anthology an isolated aberration: it is rare in the extensive critical writings of the "language" poets to encounter any reference to foreign poetry outside of Russian Futurism.

Further, the stylistic gesture most characteristic of language writing is the non-sequitur (which is quite different, it should be said, from Cubist simultaneity, Surrealist collage, or the Poundian ideogrammic method). It is the product of a generation raised in front of a television: an endless succession of depthless images and empty sounds, each cancelling the previous one. A non-sequitur implies a loss of memory, an erasing of history. "Language" poetry as it is practiced by its strictest followers is identical to the speech of television's masterpiece, Ronald Reagan: words set free of any possible meanings, sentences that ignore or contradict what has just been said, words whose effect is not meant to go beyond the second in which they are uttered: words without history.

In Reagan America there has been only one important study of pre-20th century poetry written by a poet: Susan Howe's *My Emily Dickinson.* (How many articles has *Sulfur* published on poetry before 1900?) There has been only one major new translation of a classic (Western) text: Richard Sieburth's Hölderlin. There are only two "avant-garde" poets who continue to translate regularly: Waldrop and Eshleman. Such a state would have been inconceivable to Pound, Williams, H.D., Rexroth, Eliot, Zukofsky, Olson. . . poets inseparable from their own versions of history and the places they found for themselves on the world map.

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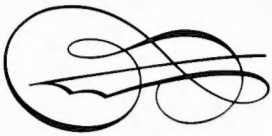

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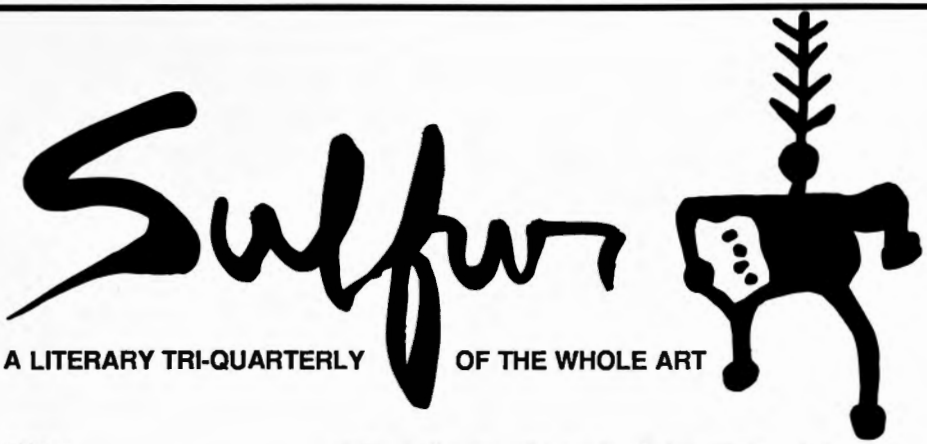

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